

# AT HOME

A thesis presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of  
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

By

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This piece of narrative nonfiction would not have had an individual and important story to tell without my Christian faith. I would like to thank God for all of his blessings and gifts in my life. My journey of faith has made me the person that I am today.

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## ABSTRACT

## AT HOME

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Western Carolina University, November 2009

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*At Home* is a work of creative nonfiction in which each chapter is a self-supporting narrative about one period of my experiences in Franklin, North Carolina, before, during, or after the Persian Gulf War and the Iraq War. This work illustrates the two-fold front during war—on the battlefield and at home—and concentrates on how war affects those on the home front. Each chapter contains newspaper articles, quotations, song lyrics, and photographs, supplementing the narrative. I have included personal artifacts and artifacts of popular culture in order to give an accurate portrait of my experience at home during the Gulf War and the Iraq War.

In this nonfiction work, I illustrate the results of war on my life through seven chapters entitled “Innocence,” “Blame,” “Homecoming,” “Never Forgotten,” “Deployment,” “Where I Come From,” and “At Home.” “Innocence” portrays my childhood before the advent of war by describing my hometown, my family memories, and family trips. The tone of the piece changes in “Blame,” which illustrates my feelings at the ages of ten and eleven when my father was deployed to Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War by showing a teacher’s kindness, musical memories, and the influence of the media. “Homecoming” depicts the outcomes of the end of the Persian Gulf War, using music, as well as my father’s return to Fort Bragg, North Carolina; a trip to

Carolina Beach, North Carolina; and my choice to avoid the news post-Gulf War. The focus of the work shifts in “Never Forgotten” from my childhood to an adult perspective—via my teenage years—and deals with my memories of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent alteration in my view of the news. “Deployment” examines my adult experiences at the age of twenty-three during the Iraq War, using my father’s deployment, my role as a teacher, and the memorial service for Staff Sergeant Bobby Franklin. “Where I Come From” details my father’s return to Franklin, North Carolina, from Iraq. In the final chapter, “At Home,” the tone changes again to one of reflection on my life as a whole and ties the whole piece together.

## INTRODUCTION

I first enjoyed writing when I was ten years old. I would read a book, watch a television show or movie, and write a prequel or a sequel in my mind and sometimes in a journal. I had a vivid imagination as a child, as a teenager, and even today. I never thought about applying this creative outlet into nonfiction until the Creative Nonfiction class I took with Professor Elliott in spring 2008. It was because of this course that I decided to write a thesis of narrative nonfiction about my experiences on the home front during the Persian Gulf War and the Iraq War while my father was stationed in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, respectively. The idea of telling my story using outside sources and remembered events was one that I thought would serve not only as an outlet to share my experiences, but also as a historical record for generations involved in war in the future.

The most valuable authors in the development of my love for reading and in the development of my own writing craft were writers of fiction, drama, and poetry. Literature that has influenced my writing craft the most includes: Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, Tennyson's "Lady of Shalott," Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, Brönte's *Jane Eyre*, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Chopin's *The Awakening*, Frost's "The Road Not Taken," Cumming's "somewhere i have never traveled, gladly beyond," Lawrence's "The Horse-Dealer's Daughter," O'Connor's "Good Country People" and "A Good Man is Hard to Find," Miller's *Crucible*, Silko's *Ceremony*, Stoppard's *Arcadia*, Chappell's *I Am One of You Forever*, and Marquez's "A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings." All of these authors represented a historical and literary period in their writing. They have memorable

writing styles and characters. They exemplify the craft that I would someday like to emulate as a writer.

When deciding how to tell the story of my life on the home front, I did not want to hide behind the device of a third person narrator to tell my personal story of war and the consequences on my life. Instead, I chose to use narrative nonfiction to tell my story so that I could use research, commentary, quotations, song lyrics, remembered stories, photographs, and newspaper articles to add a depth of discovery in my writing. I could mirror Silko's method of storytelling in *Ceremony* and use childhood stories. At the same time, I could implement Chappell's vignette writing style in *I Am One of You Forever* to create self-supporting narratives in the seven chapters of my work. Not only could I choose the correct format for my work, but I could also tell my story from my point of view, using real people instead of fictionalized characters, and I could use my own voice instead of a distanced narrator.

Once I decided the genre and structure of the work, I had to choose the correct voice to tell the truth of my own experience. The first three chapters, "Innocence," "Blame," and "Homecoming," are told from my childhood point of view. I had to decide how to do this without it seeming a contrived device. Authors often use dialect to create voice, and this was already built into my voice since my hometown is Franklin, North Carolina, in the Smoky Mountains. I could use *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Stowe as a model of craft in dialect. I wanted to make sure to write the dialogue in the work in a realistic and honest way, so that I stayed true to my own voice and the events as they happened. *Mountain Valor* by Houston, *Cold Mountain* by Frazier, and *Fair and Tender Ladies* by Smith are other examples of employing a realistic southern voice.

In order to create a childlike voice in the first half of the work, I opted to emphasize the words “Daddy” and “Mommy,” which were my terms for my father and mother during childhood. By using “Daddy” and “Mommy” and illustrating my innocent perceptions of events, I created my childhood voice. Then, in the second half of the work (“Never Forgotten,” “Deployment,” “Where I Come From,” and “At Home”), I created an adult perspective by changing my term for my father to “Dad” and my mother to “Mom,” and by giving a more complex view of my perceptions of the Iraq War. Minor changes altered both the voice and tone of the work, while also telling the story from two parallel perspectives.

In determining the structure, I knew my frame would be self-supporting chapters. The first three chapters would be my childhood experiences before the Persian Gulf War, during the Gulf War, and after the Gulf War. The fourth chapter would be an anchor to switch the focus from childhood to adulthood as well as to describe how September 11, 2001, changed my perception of the world. Then, chapters five and six would reveal my experience on the home front during and after the Iraq War. The final chapter would be my reflections on the effects of war on those on the home front and the implications of these events on my perception of home. These chapters and historical breaks allowed me opportunities to illustrate the events using photographs and newspaper articles. I could also utilize song lyrics which would connect to my feelings during these alterations in time and perspective.

In the chapters themselves, I wrote using a series of long and short sentences. My goal was to create a fluidity of text that was honest and conversational. I did not want to write my story as in the usual autobiography, retelling the facts only. Instead, I wanted



the imagery and storytelling to be so vivid that the reader could “see” what I was going through at certain points in my life. At times, I wrote using stream-of-consciousness, employing short sentences or phrases to denote importance and also to create a visual context of an event. I used this style only when it would not interrupt the flow of the work as a whole. Faulkner was an expert at stream-of-consciousness, so I used Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying* as an example for how to use this writing tool correctly, in order to supplement, not hinder, the work.

The tone of the work was the most difficult thing to differentiate. I did not want my story to sound like an autobiography with a rather neutral tone. I also did not want the tone to be negative, so that the whole work appeared to be anti-war. Instead, I chose to invoke a positive tone, even when describing difficult times. My goal in this work is not to strike a pro- or anti-war tone. Instead, I am just relating the truth of how the Gulf and Iraq Wars impacted my life. I hope that one day this work will be useful to others who have family members or friends serving in the military or who are going through another equally trying time in their lives. Besides that, this work will serve as a record for my family about what we have gone through and how we handled trying times.

When I began the writing process, I thought I was going to write about my father’s wartime experiences. When I started the interview process, I realized how difficult it would be for my father to share his personal experiences and how impossible it would be for me to understand and relate these experiences in an honest and realistic way. I realized that the story that I really wanted—and needed—to tell was the truth of my experiences during both of these wars. I did not want to fall into the snare of exaggerating the facts like James Frey did in his much-acclaimed and then discredited work, *A Million*

*Little Pieces*. Instead, I wanted my work to be a historical record of the home front during war like O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is for both the war zone and the home front. I wanted to write in a voice, style, and tone that aligned with my purposes. I looked to Moore's collection of creative nonfiction, *The Truth of the Matter*, to draw examples about how to use appropriate style, tone, voice, and point of view in my work. I chose to include honest dialogue and my Christian faith as an integral part of the work. I knew that if I were going to write an honest work, my faith could not be separated from my experiences.

My goal was to supplement my written text with newspaper articles, photographs, quotations, song lyrics, emails, and letters so that the work was more valuable through the inclusion of both primary and cultural sources. The newspaper articles were fairly easily gathered using microfiche at the Macon County Public Library. The only difficulty was obtaining a clear copy of the article with large enough text that the reader would be able to read the article. Since I could not configure large enough text to reproduce the entire article, I decided to use only the headlines and photographs from the articles, except on rare occasions. In this way, the reader gets an idea of the historical time and news articles, but is not distracted by the blurry text of the entire article.

I used other photographs from my childhood as well. The photographs came from my mother's collection of pictures. Song lyrics and quotations were easily discovered using research. I intended to use letters that my mother and father had written to one another during the Gulf and Iraq Wars and emails that my father wrote to all of us during the Iraq War as primary documents. I found out that the letters had been recycled and that the emails did not serve my purposes in *At Home*. I decided to use the primary and

cultural documents in my text not as fillers, but as supplementary documents in order to add a deeper level and more insight into my experiences and my perspective.

When considering how best to use these primary and cultural documents, I thought about including them in a separate section at the end of the manuscript. However, after much contemplation about the flow of the document, I decided that including the newspaper headlines and photographs, personal photographs, song lyrics, and quotes along with the texts that they enhanced would be the best option. Including them in a separate section with references cited in the text would distract the reader from the narrative and interrupt the flow. My only worry with that decision involved adjusting the size and assuring the readability of these primary and cultural documents.

In my personal narrative, I am the main character both as a child and as an adult. My hometown of Franklin, North Carolina, becomes a main character because of its importance throughout my life. There has not been a time in my life that I have not considered Franklin my home. In order to illustrate this, I have described life in the town of Franklin and the necessity of getting back to Franklin. My father, mother, and sister, Jennifer, are also main characters in the work, since they are my family and the focal point of the narrative. The reader should be able to feel the differences in my relationship with them throughout the work.

Narratives have been pervasive during memorable time periods, and they have survived throughout history. They have changed the way that people thought about certain accepted practices. For example, Douglass's *Narrative of the Life* and Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* changed the way that people viewed slavery and abolition, and Filipovic's and Challenger's *Stolen Voices* and Wood's *What Was Asked of*

*Us* looked at war from the points of view of young people and soldiers, respectively. My purpose in writing *At Home* is to change the way that people view those family members and friends of soldiers left at home during wartime. Even though the home front is a growing field of writing (with such works as Carroll's *Operation Homecoming* and Raddatz's *A Long Road Home*), I believe there is plenty of room for more works, and I would like my narrative to be a story for the generations of the future. I do not want my narrative to be a comment on war itself, but instead a realistic picture of the results of war.

In order to back up the information I was relating about the Persian Gulf War and Operation Iraqi Freedom, I researched general information about the wars. I found specific information about the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company's role in the wars using newspaper articles from *The Franklin Press* and *Macon County News*. I wanted the facts presented about my father's two tours of duty and homecomings to be my honest perception, but I also wanted to make sure that the dates and times checked out as well. Research is a vital part of creative nonfiction, because, in order to tell an honest story, an author must fact-check to make sure that his or her perceptions of the events line up with the facts. For example, I found that the length of each tour of duty was longer than I had remembered.

Commentary is also a crucial element of narrative nonfiction. I chose to offer clarification and interpretation of my perception of events after I first reported facts about the wars or personal memories. I did not use an overabundance of commentary, because this would have been superfluous. The stories, memories, facts, and my perception of them are sufficient to establish my point of view. An excessive amount of commentary

would have broken the flow of my personal story. I chose instead to reflect on the narrative as a whole in the last chapter, “At Home.” In this way, the text of my story speaks for itself and my commentary supplements without interrupting the flow of the larger narrative.

The overall theme of this work concerns how the choices of others (as well as our individual choices) influence our lives at a deeper level than we often realize. Looking back on these two wars, I realized that my own perspective about the importance of family and friends comes from the trials of those months when my father was stationed in Saudi Arabia and Iraq. It brings to mind Frost’s unforgettable poem, “The Road Not Taken”:

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

The events of my life have made “all the difference” in the person who I have become. Through my narrative, I hope to be an encouragement to others who are facing war or other major life changes. All of us have to endure things in life that we would rather not have to shoulder, but it is the ultimate path that we take that makes the difference in our lives. No one else can choose for us how to respond to the events of our lives. Each person has a narrative he or she could write and a story to tell about his or her life. It is the decision of each person whether or not to share his or her story and how to ultimately do so.

A major theme in the narrative is how war affects those on the home front. The majority of war narratives are written about the front lines or the battlefield. Throughout

history, war narratives have been a prevalent historical and patriotic artifact. By choosing to write about the home front as a second battlefield, however, I hope to bring to light the impact that war has on the daily lives of the wives, husbands, children, and friends of those involved in the conflict. Denial is not a way to deal with a struggle; instead, only by looking at a conflict directly can an individual hope to overcome the problem. I hope that my narrative helps others look at war from the point of view of families and friends, instead of from the perspective of an unfeeling third party.

I hope that my narrative is a record for future generations about the consequences of war on those left behind on the home front. I trust that I have created a text that is not only honest, but also entertaining to the reader. I want to show an accurate view of Franklin, North Carolina, from my childhood to adulthood. I want this text to be a scrapbook of my life where the words paint pictures of my growth as a person. This narrative has been a healing process for me—my way of acknowledging, coming to terms with, and overcoming the impression that war has made on my own life.

## CHAPTER 1: INNOCENCE

Even though I was not alive when they occurred, a few family stories are so vivid that it is as if I really lived these stories too. I can imagine, my mother, Karon, age sixteen, driving a white '71 Chevrolet Impala through Franklin, North Carolina, with her sister, Teresa, age twelve. Karon realizes someone is following her in a green '71 Ford pickup. She tries to lose him by taking the long way to Desoto Trail Restaurant to pick up supper for her family. Karon and Teresa drive up the one-way road of Town Hill, passing store fronts, and then, as they turn around, they backtrack past small businesses as they drive down Back Street toward Desoto Trail.

When Karon and Teresa stop at Desoto Trail, my father, Jerry, age nineteen, keeps going for a short distance, and then he turns around when he sees their car in the parking lot of the restaurant. He pulls his truck up next to them. He has an unlit cigar in the side of his mouth, emulating his Uncle Ed. Karon and Teresa laugh at this young man, partly out of nervousness and partly out of excitement.

Jerry smiles at Karon and asks her to cruise town with him. Karon and Teresa refuse to get in the truck with him, but Karon tells him he can ride through town with her and Teresa. Teresa, the quintessential little sister, threatens to tell their father and mother, F.B. and Helena Vinson, about Karon allowing Jerry ride with them. Despite this threat, the three drive up Town Hill and then circle back down toward Desoto Trail. Jerry attempts to talk to Karon, but Teresa interrupts them. When they get back to Jerry's pickup, he asks Karon to go out on a date with him. She accepts. The rest is history.

Five years later, they are married and become Jerry and Karon Anderson. I can envision, even without the wedding pictures, Karon standing in the vestibule of

Emmanuel Baptist Church while Jerry waits at the altar. Bridesmaids walk down the aisle in floor-length gowns of pink covered with lace accents and carry gladiolas. Then, Karon is escorted down the aisle by her father, F.B. Vinson. Everyone stands up as she enters the room and “The Wedding March” rings throughout the church. Helena Vinson, mother of the bride, looks at her daughter with pride for the woman she has become. Turner and Annie Lou Anderson, parents of the groom, look at Karon as she walks down the aisle, and then their glance shifts to Jerry as tears of joy flow down his cheeks.

Karon continues to walk down the aisle in a floor-length white gown with a matching floor-length veil of lace. She is holding a bouquet of daisies and baby breath. Her glance stays on Jerry, standing at the altar. She is bursting with joy and love. Everyone listens as the preacher speaks and as the songs “Keeper of My Dreams” and “There is Love” is sung before Jerry and Karon are united in marriage. When they say *I do*, I believe everyone in attendance could hear laughter ringing throughout the church, even as family members could taste the salt of their own tears.



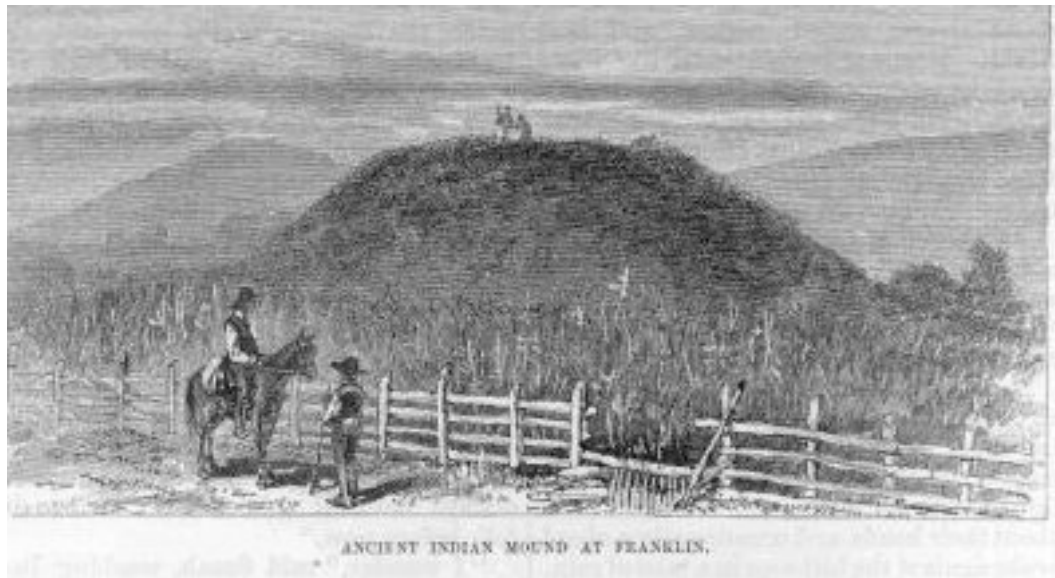


Almost three years later, I was born (in 1980), and three years after that my sister, Jennifer, was born. I started hearing and remembering these stories of my parents—now Daddy and Mommy—when I was five years old. It is amazing how a story that seemed silly to me as a child has become so essential to my life. I would not be able to tell my story without the meeting of two strangers and their love for one another.

When I look back at my youth, I remember Mommy staying at home with my sister, Jennifer, and me until we were school-age children. I see us fishing in rainbow trout ponds with Daddy. I remember spending weekends and holidays with both sets of grandparents, Turner and Annie Lou Anderson and F.B. and Helena Vinson, and aunts and uncles: Gail, Janet, Jane, Marie, Patricia, Sandra, Sherry, Teresa, David, Ellis, Gary, Homer, Paul, and Ronnie. I have so many recollections of birthdays and holidays with my family, eating lunch and sharing memories at Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. My roots are deep in my family and the soil of this land, my hometown.

My hometown is Franklin, North Carolina, in Macon County. It is located approximately sixty-eight miles and around one hour and twenty minutes from Asheville, North Carolina. Franklin is in a valley in the Smoky Mountains, which shelters it from harsh weather. Macon County was formed in 1828 from land attained in the Cherokee Treaty of 1819, and then Franklin, the county seat, was founded in 1855. Franklin is located where Nikwasi, a Cherokee town, once stood. A person can still visit Nikwasi Mound in Franklin. I used to see the lush, green ceremonial mound as Mommy drove by it every day and be amazed at its size. The heritage of Franklin has always been rich with

history, such as Civil War trails that you still can visit—labeled today with their historical significance.



However, the history of Franklin extends beyond the historical people and dates and expands further than the foundation of the city. Therefore, my history runs deep within the Appalachian Mountain range where the mountains become a blue haze. My history is in the flowing Little Tennessee River and the creeks throughout the many communities in Franklin. My history is in my family which lived and loved in Franklin, North Carolina. My history is in this small town in a valley in the Smoky Mountains that consisted of 281 people in 1890 and has over 3800 residents today. My history is in my identity which was molded from my surroundings, my family, my friends, and my experiences, as well as the past which continues to become my present and my future.

During my childhood, Franklin was no metropolis or quickly progressing town. It was a town where people still visited each other on Saturday or Sunday. It was a place where you did not have to lock your doors. You could count on your neighbors and

friends. Restaurants and businesses closed on Sundays. People took time to speak to one another on the street and genuinely cared about how other people were doing. They spoke to one another, instead of just expecting a quick response and moving on to business. Franklin was a beautiful and peaceful place to grow up with little traffic and even less crime. I do not remember a single major crime until I reached high school age, but part of that might have just been my innocence.

The beauty of the fall in my hometown cannot be described vividly enough. The leaves of crimson, orange, yellow, and brown created a kaleidoscope of brilliant color on the mountains. Franklin was beautiful—with nature coming alive or going into a deep sleep—during the seasons. In spring, the leaves flourished and flowers bloomed all over the landscape. Winter was mild, and rarely ice or snow covered the mountains and valleys with a blanket of dazzling white. Summer was filled with mild weather and beautiful lakes, creating memories of picnicking on Standing Indian for the Fourth of July or swimming in the Macon County Recreational Park pool.

As Kenny Chesney said in the song “Back Where I Come From” (which he wrote about his hometown of Knoxville, Tennessee), *I’m proud as anyone... Back where I come from*. Even though my personal memories of childhood are not unlike those portrayed on *The Andy Griffith Show*, the town of Franklin really was beautiful during my youth. Small businesses dotted Town Hill and Back Street as we drove through Franklin. Local restaurants like Longview Steakhouse and Sunset Restaurant were popular places to eat, because a multitude of chain restaurants were not available in Franklin. Nestled among the mountains and valleys, the outlying communities, such as Cullasaja, Cartoogechaye, Cowee, Iotla, and Burningtown, were unspoiled. Friends and neighbors still had large

backyards and children played outdoors. There was still a feeling of a hometown, not just a city. In my mind's eye—and in my childhood voice—I remember my hometown.

I once heard the saying: *Any man can be a father. It takes someone special to be a dad.* The authorship of this proverb is unknown, but I see a lot of wisdom in it. It takes an even more special person to be a daddy. I call my father *Daddy*. He is six feet tall with dark brown hair and golden-brown eyes—the color of mine. He smells of Stetson cologne in his dress shirt when we go to church on Sundays. He wears khaki-colored uniforms to work Monday through Friday. He wears a camouflage uniform one weekend every month and two weeks every summer as a Staff Sergeant in the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company of the North Carolina National Guard.

Even if it means working two or three jobs to provide for us, Daddy always works hard for our family. He is Wildlife Management Technician for the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, collecting biological data about deer and bears in their hunting seasons, trapping and stocking wildlife to restoration areas, sowing grass and maintaining habitats, and using data to write reports.

When I was ten and Jennifer was seven, Daddy showed us a baby alligator that had been confiscated because of illegal ownership without a captivity permit. The alligator was being taken to a nature center on the coast of North Carolina. Jennifer and I were amazed by the young reptile snapping its tiny teeth at us. Thankfully, the alligator's mouth was not yet large enough to bite us when we tried to pet it.

When he is not working for the Wildlife Resources Commission or serving in the National Guard, Daddy also mows yards and digs ditches after work and on weekends.

He loves Mommy, Jennifer, and me. He shows his love by working so hard for our family. Even though I do not know how to tell him, I appreciate all of his hard work.

Although he works too hard sometimes, Daddy is a reader and he once had a story published in the *Franklin Press* in high school. He always told me that he could write a book—a Western—if he had someone to write the story as he told it. Daddy always enjoyed a good story, whether in a book, television show, or movie. I believe I was taught my love of reading and writing by him at an early age.

## I've Been Thinking

(Editor's Note: The following is a fictional story by a student in Creative Writing in the English Department of Franklin High School. Mrs. Melba Simpson is the teacher.)

A DEER IN SEASON  
By - Jerry Anderson

On the first day of deer season I got up at four-thirty to go deer hunting. I started the jeep and drove to the head of Poplar Cove. I got there at about five-thirty, parked the jeep, and walked about a mile farther into the woods. It was almost daylight when I got to my deer stand on top of the ridge. The wind was blowing out of the northwest. The frost on the trees looked like a light snow. When the sun came out, the trees sparkled. The grass in the meadow below was a glistening blanket of emerald prisms. From the laurel thicket where I sat I could see anything that moved in the meadows below me.

The sun was getting high in the sky when I saw the bushes moving. I was ready to shoot when the deer came out into the field; to my disappointment, it was a doe. I got out my lunch and ate it. I sat there until the sun was getting low in the sky.

I heard something in the bushes behind me. I turned around slowly so as not make any noise. I had a perfect shot at a twelve-point buck. I took aim and pulled the trigger. The big buck took off like a jet rocket. I went down to the meadow where the big buck had been standing. There I saw the blood from the wound the bullet from the 30-30 rifle had made. There was a trail of it leading into the woods and I followed the trail. I knew that if I did not find him by dark, I would not find him at all. By the time I got to a grove of trees, I was running. I was mad at myself for not taking better aim. When I came to the creek, I lost the trail of blood in the stream. Then I noticed that the ground on the other side of the creek was wet. I rushed up the creek to find somewhere I could cross without getting wet. I found a tree hanging over the creek and picked my way across the slippery bark of the tree. Then I went back down the creek to pick up the trail of the buck. I trailed the deer about a mile farther and found him where he had fallen. I threw a shell in the chamber just in case the buck had any life in him. I stood there for a second. Then I moved up cautiously and kicked the buck to see if he was dead. He could move no longer, and I hung my gun on my shoulder.

I started dragging my deer toward the jeep, which I had left about two miles away. It was already dusky dark. As I was dragging the deer out of the woods, I got the feeling something was following me. I was about a mile from the jeep when a cold feeling ran up my spine. I turned around and saw in the tree above two eyes glowing like two coals of fire. At first I did not know what it was, but I soon sensed it was a panther. I had heard stories about the way a panther would follow his prey. I took off my gun and fired, but I missed. That was enough to scare him. I ran the rest of the way to the jeep with the deer. I threw the deer in the back of the jeep and took off. I kept my gun beside me till I got to the house.

I am not able with words to explain how special my mother is in my life. Mommy deserves more honor than I can ever give to her. Abraham Lincoln talked about his own mother, saying, *All that I am, or hope to be; I owe to my angel mother*. Mommy is the person that I would like to become one day. She is always kind to everybody and does all she is able to help others. She is the most unselfish person that I know.

Mommy stays home with Jennifer and me. She is the one who prepares meals, helps us with homework, entertains us, loves us, and teaches us. Mommy always has a smile on her face and love in her heart. She loves spending time with Jennifer and me, and we know that we can count on her to give us advice or help us with problems.

When I think of Mommy, I picture her actions, not her appearance. Mommy is beautiful from the inside out. She is five foot and four inches tall and a brunette. I think of her when I smell the fragrance of White Diamonds perfume. Her eyes are hazel, but they are unique because they change color from day to day. One day, her eyes look brown with specks of green. Another day, her eyes look green with specks of brown. I look deeply into Mommy's eyes in the morning to see what color her eyes will be.

I see Mommy picking Jennifer and me up in front of East Franklin Elementary School. She is in a maroon Pontiac car. She asks us, *What happened today?* We flood her with answers about knowledge, friends, and everything we can think of from the day. She listens patiently while we tell her everything—maybe the same thing two or three times. Mommy does not stop us from talking. Instead, she just listens. Jennifer and I might have been quiet at school, but we are never quiet at home. Mommy enjoys spending time with us as we do our homework and as she fixes or buys supper.

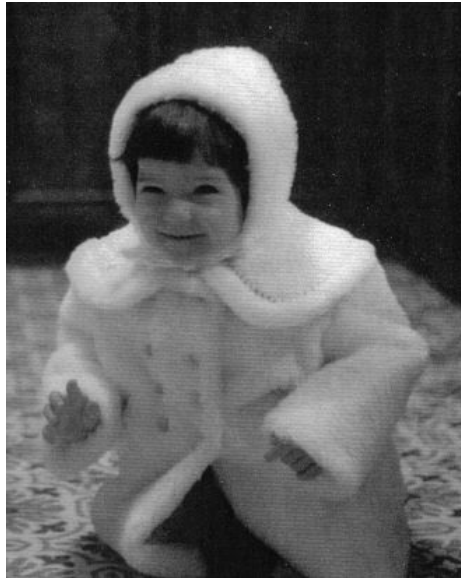
Mommy is not only my mother—my comforter and protector—but she is also my friend. She laughs and giggles with Jennifer and me at television shows or movies. She plays games with us or watches as Jennifer and I tell stories using our Barbie dolls. Mommy reads bedtime stories to us like *The Monster at the End of This Book* and *The Berenstain Bears*. Jennifer and I fall asleep knowing that we are safe at home with no worries in the world.

I am April Lynn Anderson, the oldest daughter of Jerry and Karon Anderson. I am the big sister of Jennifer Kaye Anderson. I was born on April 15, 1980. Poppy and Mamaw Anderson (Turner and Annie Lou) and Poppy and Mamaw Vinson (F. B. and Helena) always say that when I was a baby I looked like a china doll. When I was born, Dr. Kahn told my mother that I looked like a doll and it stuck with me.



When I look at the pictures of myself, I see how they think I looked like a doll—almost surreal. I was born with a head full of shiny, black, wavy hair. I had dark, golden-

brown eyes, and I was a chubby baby. In all of my baby pictures, I look like a doll set up on a shelf. I can almost see porcelain instead of reality in those pictures. As I develop into a child, I am just a skinny girl with a bowl haircut, the scent of strawberries, and the same dark brown eyes.



I hold high standards for myself. My parents never told me that I have to get all A's or B's, but I want to do the best that I can in school. I guess I am an overachiever. I want all things that I do to be my best work. I want to be proud of myself and for my family to be proud of me. I think about a lot of things—probably more than people realize. I also worry about people when they are sick or have problems.

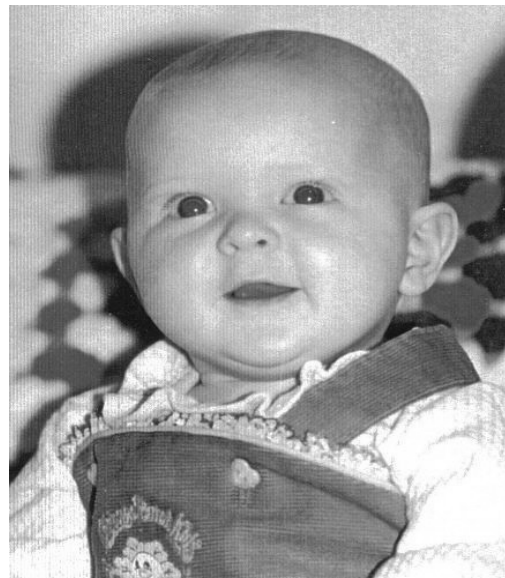
When I come home from school each day, Mommy, Jennifer, and I go downstairs into our family room. On a chalkboard, I teach Mommy and Jennifer everything I learned at school. First, I teach them spelling and math. Then, I read to them from *The Monster at the End of This Book*. They sit and listen to my lessons and are good students, since



Jennifer would rather be playing with me. If Mommy and Jennifer are busy, I teach my baby dolls or Barbie dolls what I learned at school.

I get along better with adults than with children—except for my sister. I want to talk to my family, family friends, and my teachers. I enjoy talking, but I am not an excessive talker. I would much rather listen to others than to talk myself. I enjoy learning new things, and I am fascinated with television shows and movies. I love a good story and often make up stories in my own head.

My younger sister by three years, Jennifer, is always my partner, my friend. Jennifer has blonde, wavy hair that is usually cut short. She has a cute little nose and bright blue eyes. Her hair seems to get more and more curly every year. When she is cuddling into me on the couch to watch a movie or we are playing together, I smell a hint of baby powder. Usually, Jennifer and I are in matching outfits or at least wearing the same color. We are sisters and are not ashamed of being alike.

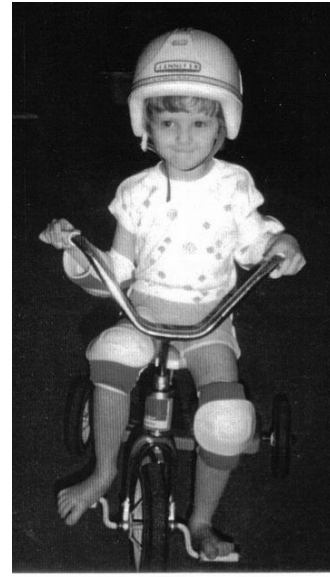


I once heard an anonymous saying that defined sisterhood by explaining: *Our roots say we're sisters; our hearts say we're friends*. I agree with this because Jennifer is closer than a sister. She is my best friend. She is the one that calls me *A-il* or *A*, my name at home even now. She is the little sister who does not say much. Jennifer does not need to talk for herself, because she has me, her big sister and protector, to speak for her and help her. She bosses me sometimes too, but that does not bother me.

Jennifer listens to me and plays with me, whether with Barbie dolls, baby dolls, Nintendo games, puzzles, or as we watch television or a movie. While Jennifer and I are riding around the patio at Poppy and Mamaw Vinson's house on our bicycles, Jennifer looks at herself in the sliding glass door each time she passes by it. After I say "The Pledge of Allegiance," Jennifer sings her own version of a patriotic song, a remix of "Frosty the Snowman" and "My Country 'Tis of Thee"—*My country 'tis of thee... sweet land of liberty... Frosty the snowman... Yeah, Yeah, Yeah*.

On long drives, Jennifer and I sing "Going to the Chapel" in unison in our family's Pontiac and break out into the silly giggles. *Spring is here (ooo-ooo-ooo)... The sky is blue (sky is blue)...* We sing in harmony. *Because we're... Going to the chapel... And we're gonna get married*. To this day, members of our family still are not able to tell us apart on the telephone.

These are all memories embedded in my childhood. Everything I do, Jennifer wants to do. I always include her, because I want her to be a part of the fun. I always know when Jennifer is getting tired, though, because she gets the silly giggles. Jennifer and I are partners in silliness and in life to this day.



A morning ritual when I was five and getting ready for school every morning was that Daddy would lift me up onto the bathroom sink and say to me, *Mirror, mirror on the wall. Who is the fairest one of all?* In unison, Daddy and I would say, *You are to one another.* About that time, Jennifer, then two, would run into the room and Daddy would hold her up onto the sink and ask the same question, *Mirror, mirror on the wall. Who is the fairest one of all?* Again, both of them would say, *You are.*

This is not a picture of vanity in my mind, but a reminder of a wonderful childhood with Daddy and Mommy encouraging us in everything. In the television show *The Wonder Years*, Kevin Arnold (played by Fred Savage) says, *Memory is a way of holding onto the things you love, the things you are, the things you never want to lose.* I feel that way about my childhood. I never want to lose the special memories that have helped mold me into the person I am today. Instead, I want to cherish these memories and share them with my own children someday.

In a family video that I have watched many times, Jennifer is standing on a wooden dining room chair in the kitchen at Poppy and Mamaw Vinson's house. Her chair is on the white-speckled linoleum in front of the sink. She is probably three years old, so I would be six. Jennifer has her hands in the water in the sink. She is picking up rainbow trout with pink and green bellies and transferring them from one side of the kitchen sink to the other. Every time the rainbow trout wiggles, she flinches and then giggles audibly. She continues to do this each time with the same reaction. She is both excited about the fish that we have caught in a Buck Creek trout pond with Daddy and worried about getting her hands dirty from touching the trout.

Everyone else seems to have the same giggling reaction, but we are not engaged by the trout. We are transfixed by Jennifer's enthusiasm and innocence. My childhood is surrounded by joy in the moment and its implications, not in the material world. Moments like this are crystal clear, like a picture in the frame of my mind.



Daddy, Mommy, Jennifer, and I used to sit down as a family and watch movies whenever we got the chance. We watched a lot of good movies back in the '80s. Movies might be a lot more high tech now, but I think they have lost character and heart in the process. We used to watch John Wayne films like *North to Alaska*, *True Grit*, and *Rooster Cogburn*, and other westerns like *The Man from Snowy River* and *The Sacketts*. We watched adventure films like *Iron Eagle* and *American Ninja*. We watched Elvis films: *Blue Hawaii*; *Paradise Hawaiian Style*; *Girls, Girls, Girls*; *Girl Happy*; *Follow that Dream*; and *It Happened at the World's Fair*. We also watched the *Beach Party* films with Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello.

Roger Ebert once said *Every great film should seem new every time you see it*. I can testify to this fact, because there are movies I have seen dozens of times and they are still exciting every time. To this day, I still enjoy watching classic films more than modern films. I find these '80s films reminiscent of the time I spent with my family back then on our comfortable brown sofa with the smell of buttered popcorn and the sound of laughter in the air.

In another family video, Jennifer and I are showing our love of movies and music, dancing to Elvis' "Stop Where You Are." Jennifer and I are downstairs at Poppy and Mamaw Vinson's house. I am eight years old and Jennifer is five. I am wearing a pastel purple jumpsuit and Jennifer is wearing a light pink jumpsuit. We are watching a video of *Paradise, Hawaiian Style*, starring Elvis Presley, and Jennifer is singing along. Jennifer and I are hula dancing to the music. I can hear Elvis singing, the music playing, and my family laughing in the background. I can almost smell the scent of Poppy and Mamaw's house, clean with the scent of potpourri in the air.

Jennifer and I are bumping hips and then halting in place when we hear *Stop where you are...Don't move an inch...* Then, we start dancing around and bumping hips again. Bump, Giggle, Bump, Giggle, Bump, Giggle. *Stop Where You Are...* Bump, Giggle, Bump, Giggle, Bump, Giggle. *Don't move an inch...* Bump, Giggle, Bump, Giggle, Bump, Giggle. When I do not stop along with her, Jennifer wraps her arms around my waist and screams *Stop! A-il. Stop!*



At other times, Jennifer and I thought it was a real treat when Mommy took us to Rose's department store after school or on the weekend to buy household supplies. We thought it was even better when she treated us to a hot dog all-the-way from Rose's snack bar. We would take our hot dogs home and eat them as an after-school snack and look forward to the next time Mommy would take us to Rose's. I remember the hot dog piled full of toppings: ketchup, mustard, chili, onions, coleslaw, relish, and sometimes kraut. Years later, when Rose's stopped serving hot dogs all-the-way in their snack bar and eventually closed down the store altogether, I felt like more than just a store had closed in Franklin.

Every year during the fall, Daddy, Mommy, Jennifer, and I take our drive to Nantahala, an even smaller township in Macon County, to look at the leaves along the winding roads of the mountains. Then, we stop at Lakes End to have lunch. Jennifer and I especially look forward to what we call *the best french fries in the world*. The local restaurant cuts up fresh potatoes with the peeling still on and deep fries them. In September, Jennifer and I start asking Daddy and Mommy when we are going to Nantahala. Secretly—or not so secretly—we are craving those fries. My childhood memories of those trips stick out even more now that Lakes End no longer serves that specialty.

During my childhood, Daddy, Mommy, Jennifer and I took many family trips to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. We went to see the Smoky Mountain Jubilee with High Pockets, a comedian who performed both skits and impersonations. The show also included country, bluegrass, and gospel music. We would shop at Pigeon Forge or

Sevierville. My favorite part of vacationing in Pigeon Forge was taking a trip to Cades Cove, a scenic loop through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It is an eleven-mile, one-way loop through the valley. I always hoped to see wildlife—bears, deer, and turkey—as we drove slowly through the tour and stopped at any slight chance of seeing wildlife. There are also log homes, outbuildings, barns, and churches along the route with historical significance. I always enjoyed these trips because it reminded me of home.

I am sitting at a small table in children's church at Prentiss Church of God. All the children around me are watching and listening to the teacher. I am seven years old and I am so excited to be there that I am looking around at all of the other children. I look over at Jennifer, who is four, and she is looking around too. I make eye contact with Jennifer and we both smile.

The lady standing in the center of all of the tables (I do not remember her name) is wearing a dress and high heels. She is beautiful. As I begin to focus, I realize that she is teaching about Psalm 23. *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* She is telling us what it means, line by line. *God will watch over you, no matter where you are.* I look around the circle of children again. I wonder who they are. *He will provide for all your needs.*

I begin to look at the picture in front of me of the shepherd holding the sheep. I think of how nice it would be to hold a baby lamb in my arms. The lamb would be so soft. *Lambs need protection,* I think. I listen as the lesson continues and hope I can come back again. At the end of children's church, the lady asks us to practice and memorize the verses at home and says that we will practice these lines again next week in children's church.



My childhood is like a wrapped package covered with heart design wrapping paper and a shiny red bow. The memories of my childhood are the gift itself. They—unlike material things—cannot be broken, ruined, or cast away. No matter how many Crickets, Teddy Ruxpins, games, clothes, or toys I received as gifts as a child, they are nothing compared to my memories. The memories are a part of who I am.

The wrapping paper outside my memories, then, is my family. As Anthony Brandt, author and editor of several National Geographic Society Press publications, says, *Other things may change us, but we start and end with family*. Without my family, my memories would be impossible and completely changed. They are an inseparable part of my life, so they cannot be discarded like ordinary wrapping paper. Family is the type of wrapping paper that you neatly fold up and save for a future celebration.

The bow on top of all the memories of my childhood that gives them flair is my faith. My childhood was wrought in faith—faith in God, faith in my family, and faith in myself. Without my faith, I would be a completely different person. I would be insecure about the world, my family, other people, and myself. I am thankful for all the memories of my life and the people who have shared the memories with me.

## CHAPTER 2: BLAME

In a letter to his wife in 1864, Robert E. Lee wrote: *What a cruel thing is war: to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world.* I did not have much insight into his thoughts before the Persian Gulf War in 1990 and 1991. Afterward, though, I knew what separation and blame were. I had felt both.

The year is 1990 and I am in fifth grade, age ten, in Ms. Emma Jean Taylor's classroom. Every day, I want to go to school in my MC Hammer parachute pants. I ask Mommy to wash the pants so I can at least wear them every other day. Suddenly, the pants disappear and no one can find them.

I do not blame Mommy now for *misplacing* them so that I could no longer wear them. However, I was more worried about popular culture than history back then. I did not put much thought into the fact that in 1990, Nelson Mandela was released, that the Berlin Wall fell and united East and West Germany, or that President George Bush signed the Clean Air Act. I was focused on entertainment and fashion. I knew that Bette Middler's "Wind Beneath My Wings" was the song of the year and I had seen *Driving Miss Daisy*, the Academy Award Winner for Best Picture in 1990. I was watching *Home Alone* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I did not know that the average house could be built for \$123,000 or that the average household salary was approximately \$29,000. Instead, I was listening to Garth Brooks and Vanilla Ice.



When Daddy's National Guard unit, the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, was activated, it was a great shock to me. I had no idea where Kuwait was or why someone would invade another country. The idea of conflict or war had not entered my mind. I just knew the town of Franklin and the surrounding peaceful places I had visited as a child. I did not have an education about anything overseas. My fifth grade class was focused on North Carolina history, far from where Daddy would be—in Saudi Arabia.



Even though the Gulf War was not long in duration, it felt like a century to me. In truth, the Gulf War lasted from August 2, 1990, to February 28, 1991. My daddy, Jerry T. Anderson, belonged to the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company. The 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company incorporated 183 members from the Sylva, Franklin, and Murphy, North Carolina, armories. His National Guard unit was placed on alert on August 24, 1990.

Before the Gulf War, the 210<sup>th</sup> served one weekend a month and two weeks during the summer, so none of the families expected the 210<sup>th</sup> to be sent to war. Regardless of our beliefs, almost six weeks after the beginning of the war, their unit was

activated on September 12, for a length of ninety days. They were required to report to Fort Bragg Army Base near Fayetteville, North Carolina, approximately 322 miles from Franklin, North Carolina, in seventy-two hours.

On September 30, the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company was deployed to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, which was around 7000 miles from Western North Carolina. The 210<sup>th</sup> was then stationed alongside the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky. During the Gulf War, the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company was involved in following the retreating Iraqi soldiers back into Iraqi territory. For security reasons, Daddy could not tell us where he was or what he was doing during his tour of duty in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. I still do not know much about what Daddy faced during the Gulf War, but I do know how it affected me as a ten-year-old girl living in the mountains of North Carolina.



On September 10, 1990, Mommy, Jennifer, and I gave Daddy a surprise thirty-eighth birthday party. He had been activated in August, but we did not know that he would be deployed and be in Fort Bragg less than five days later. We heard rumors of the

210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company being deployed, but we did not want to believe them.

While time allowed (even though we did not know the minimal time we had to spoil Daddy), we invited both Daddy's and Mommy's sides of the family to celebrate Daddy's birthday in a reserved room at Macon County Recreational Park.

Daddy's side of the family included Poppy and Mamaw Anderson; Aunt Janet; Aunt Jane; Uncle Ellis and Aunt Sandra and their two sons, Steve and Charlie; Uncle Paul and Aunt Marie; Uncle David and Aunt Gail; and Aunt Patricia and Uncle Gary. Mommy's side of the family was Poppy and Mamaw Vinson; Uncle Ronnie and Aunt Sherry and their daughters, Ashley and Katelyn; and Aunt Teresa. The conglomeration of family was an impromptu send-off that we had not planned. Even though we had planned the birthday party, we did not know this would also be a goodbye party as well.

# The Franklin Press

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Monday, September 17, 1990

One Section, 10 Pages — One Supplement

25-Cents

## Community bids farewell to Guardsmen



**LOCAL NATIONAL GUARDSMEN PARADED THROUGH** downtown Franklin en route to Sylva, where on Saturday they deployed to Ft. Bragg to await potential duty in the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Desert Shield. (Photo by Decker)

Almost three weeks later, on September 28, Mommy, Jennifer, Poppy and Mamaw Vinson, Aunt Janet, and I went to visit Daddy at Fort Bragg. Daddy bought Jennifer (who was then seven) and me (at ten) dog tags, army t-shirts, and camouflage pants, because we wanted to be like him. Little did we know that on September 30, only hours after we departed for Franklin, he would fly out for Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

When we got home, we found out that he had left. He had called and told Poppy and Mamaw Anderson he was leaving. I cannot imagine how they felt during that conversation. He had not been able to tell us that he was leaving for safety reasons, but I wished that I had spent more time with him now that he was gone to Saudi Arabia. If we had known that we only had two or three hours before he departed for the Middle East, then we would have spent every minute we had remaining with him, but Jennifer and I had school the next day and Aunt Janet needed to go to work. We could have taken him to his favorite restaurant for supper and dessert or seen a movie. We could have spent time together, laughing and sharing, before he left the United States for an undetermined time. I did not know any of this when I left Fort Bragg. I cried bitterly when I got home and found out Daddy was on his way to Saudi Arabia, because I knew he was far away and no longer safe.

## **Has 210th deployed?**

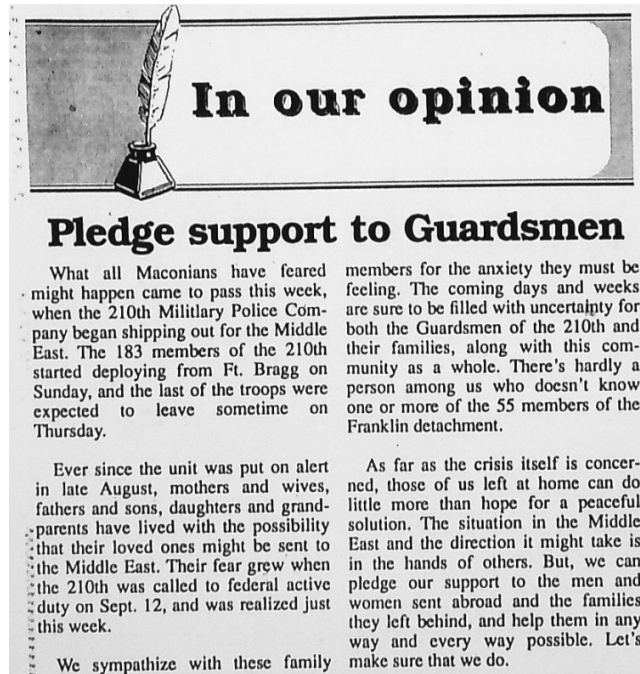
***Family members say part of unit now on way to Middle East; Guard offers denial***



**FAMILY MEMBERS** of local National Guardsmen visited Ft. Bragg over the weekend — and found that most members of the unit were leaving Sunday for the Middle East. A Guard spokesman, however, has denied that the troops left Ft. Bragg or the country.

I was ten years old when Daddy was activated and deployed, so war was an idea I could not grasp. I knew two things: Daddy was not at home and I did not know when he would return home. I remember the farewell that I said to Daddy when I left Fort Bragg. I did not mean goodbye to be a long-term farewell, so I cannot put into words the confusion I felt when he was gone and I did not know when I would see him again.

Daddy was going to Saudi Arabia to fight a battle I could not comprehend as a child. I did not question why he had to go. Daddy said he had to go—so he must—but I did feel a tremendous sense of loss. I could not explain it then. I cannot even put it into words now. The best I can do is say that I simultaneously had confidence Daddy would come home and anger towards the man who sent him to war in the Middle East, who was, in my eyes, President George H.W. Bush. Even though it really did not do me or anyone else any good, it took years for me to get over that anger. I felt like I needed someone to blame and I did not care who—as long as it was not Daddy.



I will never forget Ms. Emma Jean Taylor, who was my fifth grade teacher at East Franklin Elementary School. She embodied Henry Brooks Adams' (journalist, novelist, and historian) quote: *A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops*. Ms. Emma Jean was one of the best teachers in my school career. She made every subject she taught come to life—not only through interesting lessons, but through her concern for her students.

Her students did not call her Ms. Emma Jean out of nonchalance or disrespect, but through respect and care for this tremendous teacher. I can still remember the months after Daddy's deployment when Ms. Emma Jean treated me with kindness. I want to make it clear that it was not partiality, because she would have done the same for any student going through a trial in his or her life.

I still appreciate Ms. Emma Jean, and I could never explain how much, for allowing me the small gesture of watching the news after I finished my lunch. The



lunchroom accommodated approximately two hundred elementary school students in the third, fourth and fifth grades, ranging in age from eight to eleven. When I went to lunch each day, I felt small and inconsequential. When I did talk at the lunch table, it was about inconsequential things like television shows such as *Saved by the Bell* or *Full House*.

Ms. Emma Jean gave me something to look forward to each day when she allowed me to go back to the classroom after I finished my lunch and watch the news. The images flashing across the television screen were not comforting, but knowing something—anything—was the only respite I had each day. I do not know how she knew this small blessing was so important to me, but she seemed to know nonetheless.

While Daddy was deployed, Mommy, Jennifer, and I stayed with Poppy and Mamaw Vinson. I would lay down in the waterbed at my grandparents' house, feeling like I was tossed on a ship in a turbulent sea. I prayed unceasingly for Daddy to come home safe from Saudi Arabia. I prayed each night, believing my prayer would be answered and that my father would come home the next morning. Alfred Lord Tennyson said of prayer: *More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of*. As a child, with everything that was in me, I believed that prayer worked.

I did not pray a complicated or scriptural prayer. I did not get down on my knees and stay there. I did not pray out loud. Instead, I prayed a bold prayer from a child's heart. Each night, before I fell asleep, I repeated *God, please keep Daddy safe and bring him home to us. Bring him home safe to Franklin. I know you will answer this prayer. Amen.*

My prayer was not answered immediately, but it was answered. During the months of waiting, I kept stories of faith in my head. When I caught myself worrying, I

would try to think of biblical stories of prayers answered that I had heard in children's church at Prentiss Church of God. Abraham and Isaac find the sacrifice on the mountain. Elijah calls down fire on Mount Carmel. Jesus feeds five thousand. Blind men see. Paralyzed men walk. Woman is healed of sickness. From the experiences of others and the stories that I had heard as a child, I believed that prayers were answered.

## ***Guard's Saudi tour extended 90 days***

We could not often speak to Daddy on the telephone while he was in Saudi Arabia, and it took what seemed like forever for us to receive a letter. Jennifer did not understand why she could not talk to Daddy whenever she wanted. The few times Daddy was able to call on the telephone, Jennifer would not talk to him. I cannot tell you with complete certainty why she did not want to talk to Daddy. She could have been afraid to talk to him or upset because he had not called, or maybe she was afraid she would cry. However, I do know that I couldn't wait to talk to him when he called. I sometimes did not know what to say to him, but that did not stop me from being a motor-mouth those few times.

So, it took us by surprise when we received a video message from the 210<sup>th</sup> for Christmas. The video started off as a type of *Top Gun* montage with “(There's) Always Something There to Remind Me,” performed by Naked Eyes, playing in the background. *I walk along the city street... You used to walk along with me.* We could see the 210<sup>th</sup>

training, men reading letters, helicopters flying in the background, men playing volleyball, and the camera capturing pictures of the desert, the barbed wire, and the guards. *And every step I take reminds me... Of just how we used to be...* Even today, when the song comes across the radio, I still turn up the volume and sing along.

The video then broke off and the soldiers in the 210<sup>th</sup> got a chance to send messages home to their families for Christmas. Mommy, Jennifer, and I watched soldiers speak to their families while we waited impatiently for my father's message. Then we saw him, skinnier and dirtier than when we last saw him, but he was still Daddy.

His voice sounded choked like he was holding back tears. *Hello, April, Jennifer, Karon. Love yuns and miss yuns. Have a Merry Christmas! Hello, everybody back there.*

Those few words and being able to see him made the day and the holidays for my family. We continued to watch the video, listening to others in the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company send messages to their families and hoping to see Daddy again. We did not see him again in the video, and the video ended in a parody of a Jimmy Buffet song, "Wasting Away in Saudi Arabia," with another section of a training montage. During the next six months, if I watched the video once, I believe I watched it twenty times. For the moment, it was my family's connection to Daddy and we cherished it.

Jennifer and I would rewind the tape and watch the whole thing again just to hear those words. We would sit cuddled up on the couch and sing along: *"I walk along the... streets you used to walk along with me... And every step I take reminds me of just how we used to be..."* We would stand up and dance to the music and sing into our pretend microphones. When the video reached the section where Daddy spoke to us, we would hush and sit down together. We listened to the words—just waiting for more.

## Guard families coping as Christmas day nears

Another video sent by a 210<sup>th</sup> soldier after Christmas showed Daddy with the stockpile of essentials we sent him: cookies, lemonade mix, candy, books, videos. He still looked skinny. We heard from an anonymous soldier about the gas masks that they had to take everywhere because of a chemical threat. We saw their tent city.

When I finally saw Daddy on camera, he said, *Tell your wife I'm taking good care of you.*

He said this to a soldier behind the camera, who responded, *He's spoiling me rotten, honey. I don't know why.*

# The Franklin Press

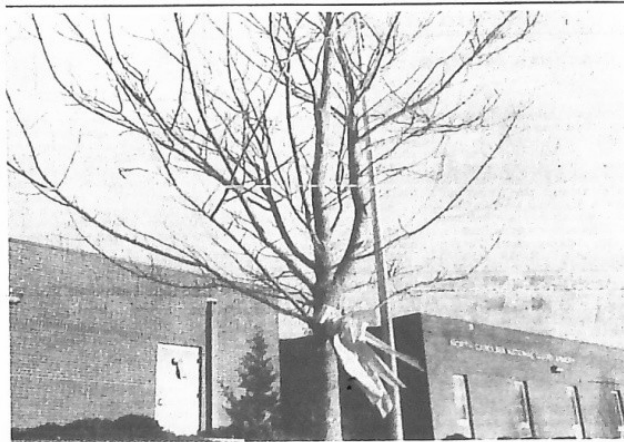
Volume 105, Number 15

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## Maconians show support for U.S. troops



### Soldiers remembered

Yellow bows placed on a tree and on a door of the North Carolina National Guard Armory west of Franklin serve as reminders that the thoughts and prayers of Maconians are with members of the Guard's 210th Military Police Company, as well as other men and women

serving in the armed forces who are on duty in Saudi Arabia. Those thoughts and prayers will no doubt intensify as Tuesday's deadline for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or face possible U.S.-led military action arrives. (Photo by Decker)



### Troops supported

As a show of the area's support for American troops in the Persian Gulf, a big yellow ribbon was recently spotted on this National Guard Armory sign in Franklin. Many ribbons are showing up around town, as "a means of showing our support for the troops," said one local person. (Photo by Sizemore)

I was glad he was taking care of his fellow soldiers, but I hoped he was taking care of himself. It was good to see him, but hard to see him in those conditions. I was torn by wanting more videos and not wanting to see him overseas instead of here in Franklin. A Holocaust survivor, psychiatrist, and author—Victor Frankl—commented on difficult situations by explaining: *When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.* Daddy had to change in his situation just as Mommy, Jennifer, and I were forced to adjust to our circumstances.

## 210th 'together' as ground war starts

*Unit will 'not be moving up with tanks' advancing into Iraq*



For me, at home, the most addictive—and simultaneously most difficult—part of the Gulf War was watching the news. ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN all had reporters in Saudi Arabia, but CNN continued live broadcasts after the bombings had begun. With permission from the Iraqi government, CNN had installed a permanent audio circuit prior

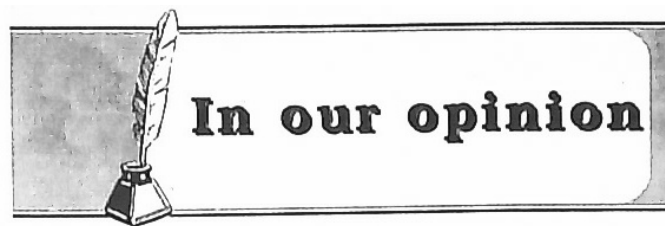
to the bombings. When Mommy turned on the television at night, we would see such violence, which seemed to get more and more graphic as the war progressed. Bombing, bombing, bombing. Black night sky broken by ceaseless green explosions. Burning oil fields. Bombing, bombing, bombing. Captured Allied Soldiers. POWs. Bombing, bombing, bombing. Surrendering Iraqi troops. Bombing, bombing, bombing.



## DESERT SHIELD - SAUDI ARABIA

Words do not do the images on CNN justice. I do not know how to explain how much these images affected my life. I wanted to see the news, hoping that the war would end, but I did not want to see the repeated bombings and other graphic images. I would go to bed with the images in my mind and wake up wanting to see the news again. My life seemed to revolve around these images, but I did not want them to be my life. I did not know yet how to separate myself from the news. When I saw these images, I believed that they were the whole truth. I did not have any education in or knowledge of media influence or bias yet. I just wanted to hear word that Daddy was coming home.

I did not realize then (but I comprehend to some extent now) how strong Mommy was to watch those images day after day and night after night. She held onto her faith that Daddy was coming home, despite those images and through the few communications with Daddy. She was the solid foundation that kept Jennifer and me from being terrified during the difficult time when Daddy was away from home. I would argue that Mommy was as much on the battlefield during those months as Daddy was. She was fighting the battle on the home front, and he was fighting the battle abroad.



### **Faith will see us through**

I often listen to WRAF 90.9 FM out of Toccoa Falls College when driving back and forth from teaching at Macon Middle School in Franklin or driving from graduate school courses at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee. On my way home from Western one night, I listened to Ravi Zacharias telling the story of being in the Middle East and doing mission work with his wife, Margie, and their young daughter, Sarah. I could visualize this family halfway across the Allenby Bridge as they were dropped off by a taxi from Jordan and picked up by a taxi from Israel. From there, they were taken to a secure immigration building to be questioned before obtaining visitors' visas. All around them, they could see Israeli soldiers with machine guns. Everyone in line with them and around them seemed tense and tentative. The silence was so thick that they could hear a pin drop.

When the Zacharias family got to the front of the line, they realized that their daughter, Sarah, had begun a staring contest with a young Israeli soldier. Although others had been scared to make eye contact, their daughter felt no fear. Before Ravi or Margie could pull Sarah away from her game, they heard her say, *Excuse me, do you have any bubblegum?* Their young daughter had just asked a favor of a soldier whom no one else dared to even look at during the process. This reminded me of all the children I have known in Franklin, full of innocence and boldness. In the building where the Zacharias family was being held, everyone around them seemed at first shocked, and then melted, by Sarah's boldness, including the soldier.

According to the missionaries' story, the soldier handed his machine gun to a fellow soldier, picked up Sarah, and took her into a back room. Moments (which seemed like hours later) the soldier came back, carrying Sarah in one arm and three lemonades for the family in the other. The family's interrogation was surprisingly short and the soldier took them to their hotel in his own Jeep.

When I listened to this personal narrative, I was entranced by Sarah's boldness. Samuel Johnson said of courage: *Courage is the greatest of all the virtues. Because if you haven't courage, you may not have an opportunity to use any of the others.* Courage is not the absence of fear, but following through in the midst of fear. I admired Sarah's courage, because an adult would have tried to be inconspicuous in the same situation. The adults would have waited out the time they were held and then gone along on their way. This young girl, though, had the empathy to speak to others with confidence and trust. She saw the best in others, even when the positive was not obvious.



When I was a child of ten, though, I had my own brief moment of shining boldness. I lay on the waterbed, tossing and turning, and believed without any doubt that Daddy would get to come home the next day. As I lay there, I said a silent, heartfelt prayer: *God, please keep Daddy safe and bring him home to us. Bring him home safe to Franklin. I know you will answer this prayer. Amen.*

I watched CNN and listened to the radio every night to hear good news. I also waited for Mommy to walk in and say that she had heard something—anything—on the news. I waited expectantly for an answer. David Brinkley, once a newscaster for NBC and for ABC, is quoted as saying the following about television news: *The one function that TV news performs very well is that when there is no news we give it to you with the same emphasis as if there were.* All news stories aired during those months were advertised as breaking bulletins, and I waited with anticipation for a report to really electrify us by telling us news of the Persian Gulf War ending. I waited for my prayer to be answered, because I knew that I could not fix this situation myself.

## CHAPTER 3: HOMECOMING



One night six months into my father's tour of duty, I lay in bed saying the same prayer I had been praying since Daddy left: *God, please keep Daddy safe and bring him home to us. Bring him home safe to Franklin. I know you will answer this prayer. Amen.*

My sister, Jennifer, and I always turned on the radio when we went to bed to replace CNN's images of war with music. Music disconnected the events of the day from our sleep at night. A playwright, novelist, statesman, and human rights activist—Victor Hugo—claims about the power of music: *Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent.* Each night, Jennifer and I were laying in the waterbed in our soft, cotton pajamas with a quilt covering us, listening to the music coming from the speakers on the stereo.

Michael Bolton's voice floods the room with "How Am I Supposed to Live Without You." *Tell me how am I supposed to live without you...Now that I've been lovin' you so long.* Billy Joel retells history in "We Didn't Start the Fire." *We didn't start the*

*fire... It was always burning... Since the world's been turning.* Bryan Adams comments on love in “(Everything I Do) I Do It For You.” *You know it's true ... Everything I do - I do it for you.* Amy Grant sings to an upbeat rhythm in “Baby, Baby.” *And ever since the day you put my heart in motion... Baby, I realize that there's just no getting over you.* Firehouse resonates in the ballad “Love of a Lifetime.” *I finally found the love of a lifetime... A love to last my whole life through.* Bette Middler soothes my concern with “From a Distance.” *From a distance there is harmony, ... and it echoes through the land.* Michael W. Smith intones “My Place In This World.” *Roaming through the night to find... My place in this world.* The radio is playing a mixture of popular songs of the ‘90s. I can still hear the voices that sang me to sleep.

Music floated across the room where Jennifer and I lay, and sometimes Mommy could hear the muffled beat of a song from the living room where she continued to watch the news. However, this night would be different. I would hear music that touched my soul on a whole new level. I heard the broadcaster say that the war had ended and the soldiers would be coming home. I could not believe my ears. *Could it really be true?* I did not know what to say or do for a moment until I heard the announcer dedicate “Hit the Road, Jack” to Saddam Hussein. I heard the voice of Ray Charles echo across the room: *What you say? ... Hit the road, Jack, and don't you come back no more, no more, no more, no more.*

By the end of the second chorus, I was singing along, and Jennifer was singing along by the third chorus. *Hit the road, Jack, and don't you come back no more, no more, no more, no more... Hit the road, Jack, and don't you come back no more.* The

sentiments of the song were the same as my feelings that night. I felt victorious because Daddy was coming home.

I felt triumphant that night when the war was over, because it meant that Daddy was coming home. Honestly, I did not feel like a conqueror because we had a ceasefire or because the United States had won in our standoff with Saddam Hussein. I felt excited because after six months Daddy was going to return to us.



The weeks waiting for Daddy to get back to the United States and then finally to Franklin were the hardest days of all those while Daddy was stationed in Saudi Arabia. I felt like a child feels when she knows Christmas is coming, but it cannot arrive soon enough. We waited and waited. It really was not that long, approximately a month, but it felt like an eternity now that we knew the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company was coming home. We continued to watch the news—afraid that President Bush, Saddam Hussein, or both would change their minds about the ceasefire. Daddy was not safe until he got home with us.

There truly are no unwounded participants of war on the battlefield or on the home front. Everyone is unequivocally touched by war, though in differing ways. There are soldiers who come home with physical injuries, but, thankfully, Daddy was not

injured during the conflict. Other soldiers in the conflict were later diagnosed with Gulf War Syndrome, an array of illnesses or birth defects that are speculated to have been caused by biological or chemical weapons. Daddy does not suffer from this illness.

However, I do not claim to know the extent that my father was wounded by the Gulf War, because even now he still does not talk about the details. I do know that war affects all soldiers even if for some it is needing to adjust again to the home front. The reservists in the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company could not have been away from home for six months without seeing changes when they arrived back home and experiencing changes in themselves while they were overseas. From the images on CNN News 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, I know the Gulf War had to have touched the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company just because they were involved in the conflict.

As for the families at home, I know from my own experience that each person was touched by war. I saw Mommy who tried, and almost always succeeded, in keeping things as normal as possible for Jennifer and me. I know it must have been hard for her, but she never complained. She kept Jennifer and me positive and active in life.

Jennifer was seven and she did not understand why Daddy was not at home. War was too big an idea for her to grasp. She did not understand the idea of it being Daddy's duty to serve his country as a member of the North Carolina National Guard.

I was older, but all I could do was pray for Daddy's safe homecoming. I understood he was in danger, but I had faith that he would come home safely. My faith had grown through the experience, but I had not overcome all of my worries. I needed to see proof that Daddy had made it home to believe that my prayers had been answered.

# 210<sup>th</sup> returning today

## *Family members head for Pope Air Force Base*

A well-known adage says *Homecoming means coming home to what is in your heart*. On March 30, 1991, I experienced my first homecoming celebration when Daddy arrived at Pope Air Force Base, about twelve miles from Fayetteville, North Carolina. Mommy had called and made reservations at a hotel which the hotel clerk said was fifteen minutes from Pope Air Force Base. The hotel ended up being forty-five minutes away from the Air Force Base. Mommy was frustrated during the long drive from the hotel to Pope. I can still remember her questioning why someone would lie about how close a hotel was to Pope when there were so many families waiting on their husbands, wives, and children.

Mommy, Jennifer and I, as well as Daddy's large family (Mamaw Anderson; Poppy and Mamaw Vinson; Teresa Vinson; Ellis, Sandra, Steve, and Charlie Anderson; David and Gail Anderson; Janet Anderson; Tommie Lou Knight; Debbie, Katrina, and Stephanie Stanley) were waiting for Daddy in the hangar at Pope. Poppy Anderson was waiting at home in Franklin to get word as soon as Daddy's plane landed. We were all standing and sitting (when an empty seat was available) among the family and friends of the other 182 members of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company.

To say that the hangar in Pope was crowded would be a major understatement. We remained there in the hangar, waiting for Daddy to arrive, standing and sitting almost on top of each other on the bleachers in the dreary hangar. One person would get up and three or more people would head toward the seat. The families that were not able to sit on

the bleachers were walking around or leaning against the walls of the hangar. Hours passed with no word of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company's arrival.

As more time passed, I became anxious and fidgety. I asked Mommy, *Where is Daddy?*

She only said, *I don't know, honey.*

Mommy was as anxious and tired as I was, and Jennifer was tired and cranky from the sitting and waiting. We could hear heavy rain on the roof, because there was a terrible storm coming through Fayetteville. Still, I was not concerned with the bad weather. I was waiting anxiously to see Daddy's plane land. Each update would tell us that the 210<sup>th</sup> had been delayed. We would get to the point when the plane should be arriving and then an announcement would tell us that the arrival was delayed for an hour—sometimes more. We all wanted an actual person to come and tell us something, face to face, but that never happened. Families became increasingly impatient in the crowded waiting area.

When a delay announcement was made over the intercom, Mommy, Jennifer, and I occasionally left the hangar to buy food or make a phone call. As we headed out the door, hundreds of other people simultaneously left as well, amidst the torrential rain. When a shuttle bus arrived, families quickly filled the seats and aisles, leaving many others in the pouring rain. I do not know how many buses we had to wait through before we were able to take the shuttle to our car. I know that it seemed like hours as water filled the holes in the gravel, creating puddles near the bus stops. I saw many people step into mud puddles and walk toward the bus with water and mud up to their knees. Many cars drove by the crowd and splashed them as the people stood in the midst of the water

flowing down the gravel road. Not one person left or returned to the hangar without drenched hair and clothes.

Despite the dreary atmosphere outside the hangar, the crowd was dressed in their best patriotic outfits—red, white, and blue all around. Yellow ribbons and signs could be seen across the room: *Welcome Home. We Missed You*. After being out in the rain, our patriotic symbols and clothing were mottled by the weather. As the day dragged on, the crowd was made up of less smiling faces and more anxious ones. By the time that the delays came again and again, Jennifer was hungry and tired. When the announcer told us the landing of the 210<sup>th</sup> had been changed from 7:30 p.m. to after midnight—making the arrival of Daddy now on Saturday, March 30—Mommy left with Jennifer and me to go get something to eat.

Mommy, Jennifer, and I ate a quick supper and went back to the hotel. Jennifer was asleep in less than ten minutes, but I did not want to go to sleep, because I did not want to miss seeing Daddy when he arrived at Pope. *I don't need to sleep*, I told Mommy. She promised to wake me up, though, so I slept for an hour. When it was time to get up and go to Pope, Mommy left Jennifer in the hotel with Poppy and Mamaw Vinson so that she could sleep.

Mommy and I got back to Pope at 11:30 p.m. The crowd had returned, but everyone's spirits were dampened by the terrible storm that had caused Pope Air Force Base to lose power. The 210<sup>th</sup> could not land there because there were no runway lights. *What will they do now?* I asked Mommy. She did not know, but we later found out that the soldiers were being bused from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, North Carolina.



I dare say the whole crowd felt disappointed by the various delays and were extremely fatigued by the physical and emotional toll of the day. I know that Mommy and I were exhausted. *The 210<sup>th</sup> will be here. Wait. There has been a delay. Wait. Daddy will be here soon. Wait. I do not know how much longer it will be. Wait.* My emotional high had turned into a low at this final moment when the 210<sup>th</sup> had to be bused from Goldsboro. I cried from fatigue and worry. The soldiers would have to land in Goldsboro, load all of their bags and supplies on buses, and drive for over an hour to Pope. Daddy was still not home yet. *Why was it taking so long? Why isn't anybody telling us anything? When will they be here?* No one in the crowd knew any of these answers.

## ***210th is back in Tar Heel state***

### ***Guardsmen reunited with families early Saturday***

I vividly remember when—at four a.m.—Daddy stepped out of the darkness of the night into the hangar at Pope Air Force Base. It reminds me of the song “Home,” written and performed by Michael Bublé, *Another airplane, another sunny place... I'm lucky I know, but I wanna go home.* Daddy was home. My excitement returned the moment he walked through that door. I was no longer tired, anxious, or sad. *There's Daddy!* I screamed when I saw him.

I remember Daddy running toward us as Mommy and I and the rest of the family—Mamaw Anderson, Janet, Jane, Ellis, Sandra, Steve, Charlie, David, Gail, and Teresa—ran toward him. Daddy grabbed me up in one arm and hugged Mommy with the other. *I love*

*you. I missed you. Glad you're home. You look skinny.* All the rest is a blur of hugging, crying, and screaming for joy.

Across the hangar, all families were clinging together. *I love you. You look good. I missed you. I wrote you every day. Are you glad to be home?* Everyone was sharing hugs and conversation all around me. The moment Daddy returned to North Carolina from the mysteries of Saudi Arabia was the best moment of my life—especially to a ten-year-old child who had been waiting for this moment for six months. All the scenes around me were beautiful. I would not let go of Daddy for even a second.



Mommy and I stayed with him until he gathered up his duffel bag and other belongings. We did not want to be away from him for a minute. The rest of the family went back to the hotel to get some rest and to call Poppy Anderson and tell him Daddy had arrived safely. He had been waiting all night to hear from them, and I cannot imagine what was going through his mind as he found out his son had made it home.

Early that morning, the rain had cleared and the weather was nice, but my excited and joyful mood had nothing to do with the weather. My excitement returned the moment

Daddy walked through the hangar door. Besides, I could not wait for Jennifer to see him. As quickly as we could, Daddy, Mommy, and I went to the hotel to see Jennifer. I will not forget the moment Jennifer saw Daddy. He walked into the hotel room where Jennifer sat watching television with Poppy and Mamaw Vinson. Daddy said, *Hey, Jennifer!*

Jennifer looked at him for a moment without saying anything. She seemed to be deciding if she was really seeing Daddy standing there in front of her. Then, she screamed, *Daddy!* Before anyone could say anything else, Jennifer ran to Daddy and was up in his arms. She had her arms wrapped around his neck. Holding Jennifer in one arm, he greeted Poppy and Mamaw Vinson. Then, Daddy greeted all his other family members again.

As soon as Daddy, Mommy, Jennifer, and I made it back to Franklin, Daddy and I went to visit with Poppy Anderson while Mommy and Jennifer prepared everything at our house. As we walked in the door, Poppy was overwhelmed with joy at seeing his son once again. The homecoming had now run full circle. In the months ahead, all of Daddy's extended family and friends also saw him face-to-face and knew he was truly safe at home.



I felt like everything was good with the world during the many special moments in the months that followed. For months, my family was walking on a cloud of precious and treasured moments. I knew my life had been blessed by having my family together again. The prayer that I had said, night after night, had been answered: *God, please keep Daddy safe and bring him home to us. Bring him home safe to Franklin. I know you will answer this prayer. Amen.* Daddy was safely with our family again. Words could not express how thankful I was during those days. *How could I ever be thankful enough for my childhood?* I knew then—and know even more now—that I had people to trust and depend on in my early life.

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35¢

## Macon welcomes its 'gallant warriors'



THE SINGING OF "God Bless the USA" prompted some applause and flag waving by members of the 210th Military Police Company during a welcome home celebration held Sunday for the unit and other active duty military personnel from Macon County. The moment was one highlight in a chilly, windy afternoon filled with patriotic speeches and songs. (Photo by Decker)

Shortly after Daddy returned, Daddy, Mommy, Jennifer and I again became busy with work, family, school, and church. Daddy spent every moment he was not working with us, and we wanted to spend even more time with him. He came to our classrooms at school—Ms. Emma Jean Taylor’s and Cathy Morgan’s classrooms. He showed the classes his helmet; passed around the Middle Eastern headdresses of brightly and exquisitely adorned blue, purple and green fabric; and gave each student currency, cash and coins, from Saudi Arabia. The banknotes are called riyals and the coins are called halalahs. It took one hundred halalahs to equal one riyal and approximately 3.75 riyals to equal one U.S. dollar. Jennifer’s classmates, as well as mine, were excited by Daddy’s visit. They wrote him a note thanking him for the money and welcoming him back home to Franklin.

Also, soon after Daddy returned, Jennifer and I dressed up in our frilly Easter dresses. After the church service, Daddy, Mommy, Jennifer and I went to Poppy and Mamaw Vinson’s house for lunch. Daddy had missed a lot while he was gone. My cousin, Katelyn Vinson, had been born in July 1990, so Daddy had not seen her for six months—since she was a newborn. He held Katelyn in his arms and talked to her, but it took her a little while to warm up to him since she had not seen him in so long.

Daddy hid Easter eggs, and the adults—Daddy, Mommy, Mamaw, Poppy, Teresa, Ronnie, and Sherry—watched as Jennifer, our cousin, Ashley, and I ran around in circles in the front yard hunting for them. Each time one of us would find one, we yelled, *Look, I found one!* Amidst the running and laughing, half the time we were spilling plastic eggs... pink, purple, green, orange... out of our baskets onto the grass along the patio or the trees. We were in a race to see who could find the most eggs first, but the faster we ran, the longer it took to find the eggs or keep them in our baskets. The adults stood on

the patio laughing and encouraging us. Jennifer, Ashley, and I laughed as we ran back and forth among the yard, finding eggs under the maple tree, swing set, Bradford pear trees, and along the border between the yard and the driveway.

We were so glad to have Daddy back with us, and we spent a lot of family time together. Shortly after he returned, Daddy, Mommy, Jennifer, and I went on a family vacation to Carolina Beach, North Carolina. We have a family video where Jennifer and I are holding plastic cups and collecting sea shells. We are happy and giggling together on this family vacation. Jennifer and I are wearing razor-backed, one-piece bathing suits. As we walk across the sand of the beach, we can hear the roar of the crashing waves and see the overcast sky. Mommy applies sunscreen again so that we will not get sunburned. We examine our shells to see which of us has the prettiest shell, taking one shell out at a time.

At night, as we walked down the beach with Daddy and Mommy, we saw fishermen bringing in catches from stationary poles. One night, we saw a crowd gathered around a fisherman who caught a baby shark. Jennifer and I were amazed by this miniature *Jaws*. We would not walk too close, but instead walked just close enough to see the shining grey fin and body. As we walked back down the beach, finding our way back to the hotel by the stream of hotel lights adjacent to the beach, Jennifer and I said, *Did you see that shark? What if the shark had been in the water when we were there?* We were glad that the shark did not end up at our ankles that day as we ran into the waves and back to the shore.

On the same video, we recorded the Homecoming Parade for North Carolina soldiers—including the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company—in Raleigh, North Carolina. We watched various branches of the military, salutes to the soldiers from businesses and

organizations, and additional entertainment passing by our location at the parade. A band plays music as they travel down the street. Soldiers throw candy into the audience. Soldiers drive by in tanks. Then, we see Daddy in the formation of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company walking by us. I say, *He waved at us. Did you see him, Jennifer?* Mommy and Jennifer see him too. We all yell his name. He keeps marching as we yell after him, and we wait on the parade to be over so we can go home.

I am proud of Daddy for serving his country, and I am also proud of my family's support of him and the other soldiers in his unit. When Lee Greenwood wrote and performed "God Bless the U.S.A.," I can imagine his thoughts and feelings. *I'm proud to be an American where at least I know I'm free... And I won't forget the men who died who gave that right to me.* In fact, the town of Franklin probably could shed light on his feelings as he sang the patriotic song.

The people of Franklin joined together during the Gulf War in support of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, so we all felt pride in their service and relief at their homecoming. Hundreds of people showed up at Franklin High School to welcome home the 210<sup>th</sup> to Franklin. The unit was driven around the track surrounding the football field. The men and women in the 210<sup>th</sup> were cheered by the crowds that filled the bleachers. They were called *gallant warriors* and *quintessential guardsmen* by many speakers at the football field, such as VFW commander Ed Bookhart and Mayor Ed Henson. There were red, white, and blue colors visible across the celebration, contrasted by the yellow ribbons that symbolized that the town had been waiting for the 210<sup>th</sup> to return all along.



## Television war – good or bad?

After a ceasefire was signed in the Gulf War and Daddy was home, I made a point of avoiding the news. Thomas Griffith, a writer and editor for *Time*, went so far as to say about the news: *The news is staged, anticipated, reported, analyzed until all interest is wrung from it and abandoned for some new novelty*. At the age of eleven, I was beginning to feel an immense dislike of news broadcasts. Shows and coverage on ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN which had been interesting to me when Daddy was in Saudi Arabia and in a war zone were no longer desirable to me. Bombing. Violence. Bombing. Tanks. Bombing. F16s. Bombing. Crying people. I did not want to see one more negative or heartbreaking image on my television screen or remember graphic images anymore as I went to sleep.

In fact, I would rather do anything post-war than watch the news. Screens filled with facts and bombings and other vivid images now were just a reminder of a painful time. This avoidance of the news did not just last for a week or a month or a year, but for years. I am not ashamed of my decision, since it is what I felt I had to do at that time in my life. Those of us on the home front wanted to go back to life as usual. We did not want reminders of the hard months past. We did not want 24 hours, 7 days a week CNN anymore. Instead, we wanted to spend time with our friends and family and to catch up on time together and events missed by our loved ones who had been overseas. We no longer wanted to live in the past or the future; we wanted to live in the present.



## CHAPTER 4: NEVER FORGOTTEN

Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and I and our family received a shock in February of 1993—before Valentine’s Day—when Poppy Anderson passed away from a blood clot. The blood clot was a result of the surgery that Poppy had had days before. Dad and Mom were called to Poppy and Mamaw Anderson’s house in the middle of the night, and they followed the ambulance on to the hospital when Poppy was taken from home. Jennifer and I waited with Poppy and Mamaw Vinson while Dad and Mom went to the hospital.

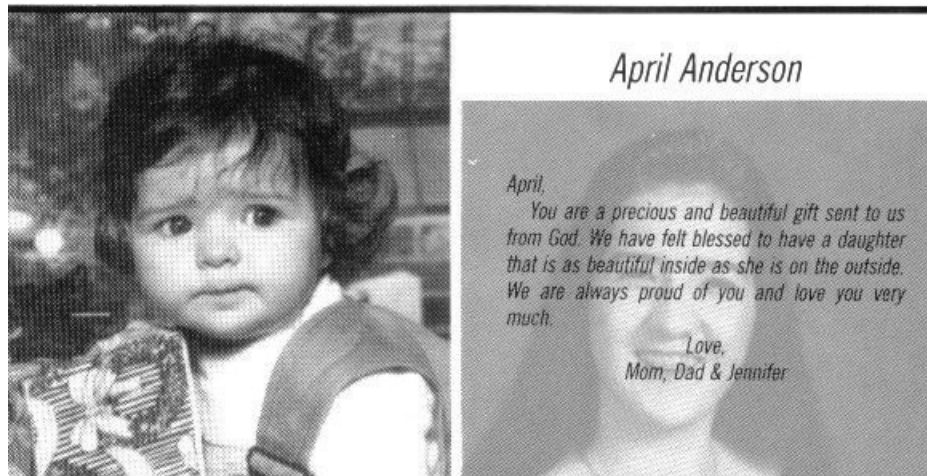
I have not liked to go to receiving friends at the funeral home ever since the day that I saw Poppy lying in a coffin. I was thirteen and it was traumatic for me, but it was even harder on Jennifer, at ten. As we went to the funeral and the graveside, I could not believe that it was Poppy lying there. I believed he was already in heaven, in a place of beauty and peace. These thoughts helped me to get through those days. I was still sad, but I had hope for the future.

It seems like just yesterday when the Persian Gulf War was over and life returned back to usual for my family. Dad was back at home, so there was no daily drama or daily worry about his safety. I soon moved on from elementary school at East Franklin to middle school at Macon Middle. My middle school years had drama of their own, which I never saw coming in August 1991. There were first crushes, girl dramas, and personal insecurities. I disliked school during those days. My priorities were my own personal life—family and friends—and not my education. My life was still simple, compared to the short, six-month occurrence of the Gulf War that Dad experienced. Moving on to Franklin High School signaled a break from the middle school drama to a more balanced

existence. There were still crushes, girl dramas, and personal insecurities, but these minor instances were nothing compared to what life had been like in middle school. I now focused on my education again, looking toward college.

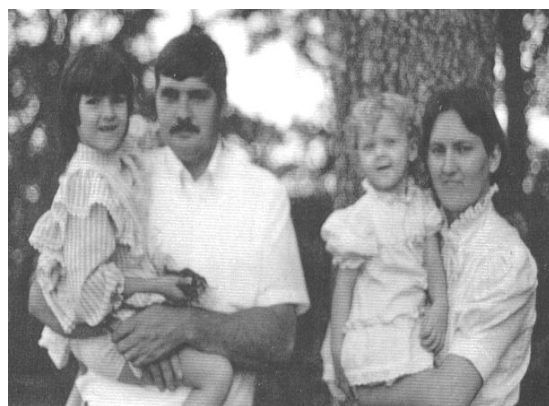
Amidst all the learning, I also had a lot of fun during my high school years. I worked at Macon County Public Library with a wonderful group of men and women—Karen, Loretta, Rhonda, Carol, Janet, and Edwin—who were so kind to me and taught me a lot about books and research. Franklin High School included dances and junior and senior proms with friends. Everyone dressed up in their best with no worries about the future.

I will not forget senior pictures, marking the end of my high school days or graduation with red robes and caps with tassels. Vitamin C's song "Graduation (Friends Forever)" became a big hit. *As we go on, we remember... All the times we had together.* I was crying, saying goodbye to friends. Family and friends told me not to rush through high school, because it would be the best days of my life. Those were not the best days, but they sure were good ones.





As I walked across the stage at graduation, I thought of all of the memories that I had had with Dad, Mom, and Jennifer. I thought of vacations—Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Singing in the car. Dancing to musicals. Giggling until we cried. Dad serving in the Persian Gulf War. Mom chaperoning dances at Macon Middle School. Interviews for Teaching Fellows Scholarship. There were so many memories that I could not contain them all. A small part of me worried that the memories would end, but I knew that the memories would always be with me and would continue in a new way in the future.

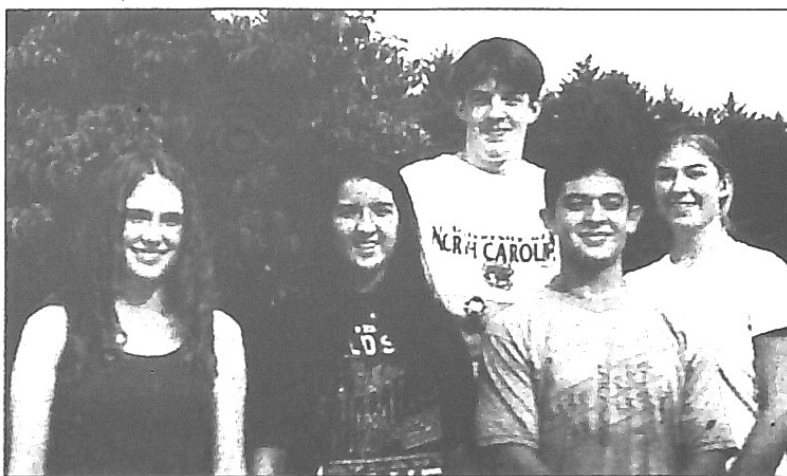


I guess I should have known that I would be a teacher one day from the way that I loved school and sharing knowledge with others, but I didn't know it as a child or even as a teenager. As I worked through my studies, I was contemplating what I wanted my future job to be. Up until eighth grade, I had thought I wanted to be a lawyer. I had a glamorized picture of lawyers such as in *Legal Eagles* and the television show, *Matlock*. In eighth grade when I saw a classmate face a real-life criminal trial, I began to be confused about law. Then, sadly, I realized that life did not always end as justly as the dramas on television. When in middle school and high school, I heard about other major crimes that touched people I knew. All of these incidents did not turn out as the community expected. I realized that I could never defend anyone I thought was guilty or prosecute anyone who I thought was innocent, so I gave up my dream of becoming a lawyer and turned to teaching instead.

At sixteen, while working at Macon County Public Library, I remembered how much learning and sharing knowledge meant to me. Of course, teachers like Nancy Callahan, Emma Jean Taylor, Anne Mehaffey, Grace Lane, Denise Kehoe, and Vickie Sutton helped in my decision because of their positive impacts on my learning experience. Nancy Callahan and Emma Jean Taylor were my second and fifth grade teachers, and their knowledge and empathy taught me what a good teacher should be. Anne Mehaffey and Grace Lane were middle school teachers who sustained my love of learning even during the most difficult school years. Denise Kehoe and Vickie Sutton were high school teachers who solidified my choice to become a teacher due to their excellent teaching techniques and real-life connections to their subjects, U.S. History and English.

When I was a junior in high school, I took a career placement test that was supposed to determine which careers would be best for me. My results said that I should contemplate becoming a lawyer, psychologist, teacher, or writer. I had always liked teaching others what I had learned, so I looked toward becoming a teacher.

I decided to become a teacher my senior year of high school and applied for a Teaching Fellows Scholarship from the State of North Carolina. Fortunately, I received a Teaching Fellows Scholarship to help me obtain the goal of becoming an English teacher.



(From left to right) Franklin High School seniors Sarah Hubbs, April Anderson, C.W. Wilson (back), Walter Herz, and Emily Gay will attend either Western Carolina University or the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on four-year academic scholarships. (Photo by Elaine Minton)

The Teaching Fellows Scholarship allowed me to obtain a Bachelor's degree at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina, with little expense to my family. Western was about thirty minutes from Franklin, so I could visit home whenever I wanted. In return, my responsibility was to teach for four years in a public school in North Carolina, post-graduation. I accepted the scholarship and began my course of becoming a teacher.

In August 1998, when I graduated from Franklin High, I began college courses at Western Carolina University. My goal was to become a high school English teacher like Vickie Sutton, my favorite English teacher and most influential high school teacher. I started my courses and formed a group of friends quickly through the Teaching Fellows Program. Angela Johnson became one of my best friends during those college years. She was a freshman as well and she came from Stony Point, North Carolina. Angela was an excellent student, but, even more than that, she was an excellent person. She always had a heart for people, so I enjoyed spending time with her at seminars and at conferences.



Then, we really bonded at an overseas Teaching Fellows trip over the summer to England, France, and Switzerland. When I got airsick and homesick on my first plane trip anywhere, Angela stayed with me and took care of me. She was a constant comfort and did not complain one time. Fortunately, I did enjoy a lot of the sights overseas. I was so excited to go see *Les Misérables* in the London theatre by way of taxi. I loved the Swiss Alps with the beautiful blue lakes and snow-capped mountains. Even though I had a good

time overseas, I was glad to get home to Franklin. Throughout all the trips and seminars, I enjoyed my classes at Western Carolina University, and I was enjoying college life. Life seemed so simple during those days.

I remember sitting in Educational Psychology class at Western Carolina University on September 11, 2001. I was sitting next to my best friend, Angela, waiting for class to begin. We were having the usual undergraduate discussion, ten minutes into class with no teacher. *When are we allowed to leave if she does not show up? Now? Wait five minutes? Wait ten?*

Suddenly, a late student came in, reporting that a plane had hit one of the Twin Towers. Living in Western North Carolina we were all a bit disconnected from the news at first. Nonetheless, I was confused and saddened by the tragedy. Five minutes later, the professor walked into the room and told us that the second tower had fallen in New York City. She cancelled class, and we all went off our separate ways, puzzled and dismayed by the news.

Angela and I left class together and decided to walk across the street to Subway to buy lunch. Waiting in a line with seven people before us, we caught the first glimpse of the catastrophe on the screen of the Subway television through the lens of CNN. It was surreal watching a plane hit the first tower and then a few minutes later watching a second plane hit the second tower. The images of people jumping from buildings and the chaos on the streets were overwhelming. Then the images of a plane crashing into the Pentagon began flooding the news broadcasts.

Soon after, the television networks—ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX—were reporting the passengers of Flight 93 banding together against terrorists, who they believed were

headed toward the White House. As I viewed the wreckage in a Pennsylvania field, I found myself wondering if I would have done the same thing in the same situation. I did not want to watch the images, but, at the same time, I could not turn away from the visuals coming across the television screen.



I got through the lunch line and headed back to the Teaching Fellows office, the main gathering place for students who are part of the Teaching Fellows' Scholarship.



Once in the Teaching Fellows' office, Angela and I met a barrage of discussions about the attack on New York. No one knew yet who was responsible for the attack, but we all knew that it was not only a deplorable act, but an historic day in America. Life would not be simple again. Fear had already gripped everyone in that room and I believe all over the United States as well. We had been attacked on our own soil. Each one of us felt victimized by the actions, the images, and the feelings of vulnerability that bombarded us.



As I drove home from Cullowhee to Franklin at six p.m., visions of the day ran through my head. I could not get the graphic images of crashing planes, fuel explosions, jumping people, collapsing towers, mutinying passengers, and running survivors out of my head. As much as I would have liked to avoid the news that evening, I was drawn to the visuals repeated from the morning. At times, it felt like the reports were not real unless I saw them again. The reports looked like a nightmare scenario from a horror movie. As much as I tried to disconnect from the news, I could not pull myself away.

Even though I knew no specific person in New York City, I knew in my core that the same type of terrorism could happen anywhere.

As I watched what happened at the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, and with Flight 93, I knew that life in America had changed forever. I felt a fear that I had never felt before. I had always felt safe in America and disconnected from the turmoil abroad in my small hometown of Franklin. Now that I knew that even the Pentagon was at risk, I felt that I had lost the naïveté about terrorism I had had the day before. I could not believe that my third cousin, who worked at the Pentagon, could have been present when the attack occurred there. She was not there at the time of the crash. We were so glad to hear from my great-aunt that she was okay. I felt that my life had been touched by the tragedy as my mind was seared with graphic images.



I had made a conscious decision post-Gulf War to not watch the news 24/7, but now I found myself glued to the television again. I did not want to miss some crucial bit of information that might explain what was happening or what I could do to help. I found

myself watching the news day after day and frequently checking it online when I had the time. I kept waiting for some break in the reporting or some explanation for the tragedy that made sense in my own mind. I found no resolution then, and more than eight years later I still do not understand the actions taken by terrorists on September, 11, 2001.

Less than a month later, different images flooded the television screen: images of aircraft carriers, fighter jets, and tanks. The war in Afghanistan, which is called Operation Enduring Freedom, began on October 7, 2001, and is continuing today. The intention of this war was, and still is, to defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda and to capture those responsible for the attacks on September 11, 2001. I spent days and nights worrying that Dad and his National Guard Unit would be called up to serve in Afghanistan. They were not called up then (nor have they been), but that did not keep me from waiting and worrying. I will not judge the conflict, nor will I try to defend it. Neither alternative is my goal; I just want to put down in writing how these events affected my life on the home front.

As the war goes on, there seems no limit to the number of lives the conflict has touched directly or indirectly. My thoughts and prayers are always with the men and women serving in Afghanistan, because they have been, and will be, fighting a difficult and a dangerous conflict until victory can be called in Operation Enduring Freedom. *When will victory happen?* I know that the families, friends, and troops themselves must ask themselves this question daily. I hope for the day that this country can be free from the danger of terrorism, but I wonder if that day will ever come.

*How can terrorism be obliterated when any person can decide to bring fear upon the lives of hundreds, thousands, or millions of others?* I wait for an answer to this

question, but I cannot offer one myself. I watch the newscasts today, more than eight years after Operation Enduring Freedom began, and I see more threats of terrorism than I saw before the war in Afghanistan began. I cannot say I have an answer to any of these questions or to the problems facing America then or now. I can only say that I am like millions of other Americans who are looking for a day when no conflict is being fought at home or abroad. When that day comes, I might swear off the news again.

Upon graduation—in 2002—from Western Carolina University, I was hired by Principal Terry Bell as a seventh grade Language Arts teacher at Macon Middle School, the middle school of my youth. Jennifer graduated from Franklin High School the same year with the plan to attend Southwestern Community College in Sylva, North Carolina. I can honestly say that I enjoy my job every day and am thankful to be working in my hometown. I now teach eighth grade Language Arts at Macon Middle, and I love teaching Appalachian and American literature to the students in my own town. I look back on those uncomplicated days when I taught Mom and Jennifer in our family room and see that, even as I child, I somehow knew my purpose in life.



## CHAPTER 5: DEPLOYMENT

I grew up in a small town, but I did not then and will not now complain. Instead, I am proud of where I came from, and that is why I decided to teach in my hometown of Franklin after graduating from Western Carolina University. I began teaching at Macon Middle School in 2002 and each day attempt to share my love of reading and writing with my students. At times, it does not feel like it has been but a day since I was a teenager myself or a child growing up in Franklin.

I can still see myself sitting in a classroom desk, intent on what the teacher is saying. Not speaking. Not distracting. Involved in learning. My goal is to ensure that my lessons about reading, writing, and grammar are interesting and educational, so that students stay engaged in their own learning. I also want to connect my lessons to real-life applications so that students can relate the skills they learn to their adult lives. These were the things on my mind in the fall of 2002, being the best teacher that I could be.

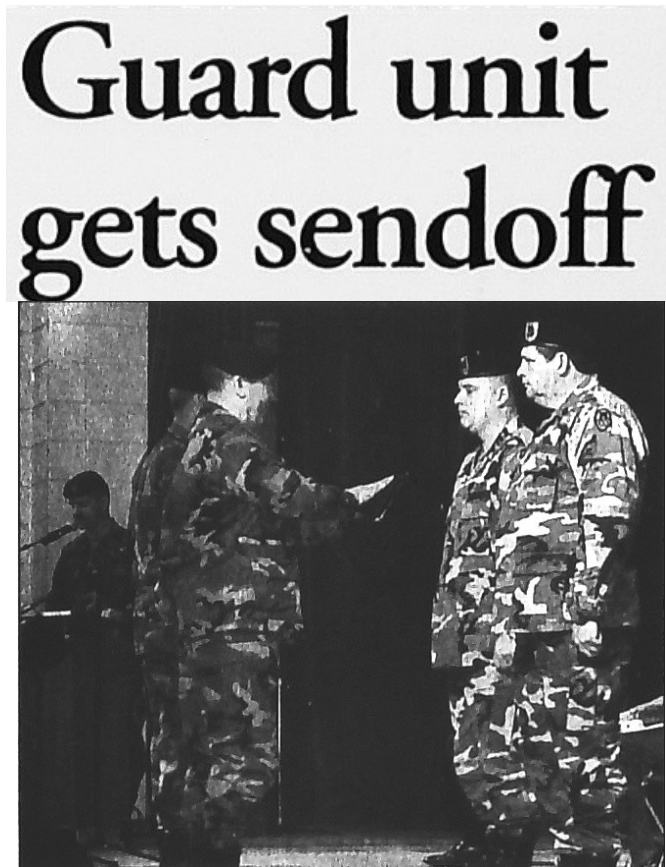
# Family members prepare for Guard unit's activation

## Guard called to active duty

I have to admit that I did not see the Iraq War coming until it had already begun, especially with the irony attached of a second President Bush going to war with Iraq. I

had spent so much time worrying about Dad being called up to go to war in Afghanistan that Iraq was not even on my mind. When I heard talk of war with Iraq, I pictured the anti-climactic war atmosphere of the Persian Gulf War with Iraqi soldiers surrendering and no opposition, so I did not worry that Dad would be called up to serve in Iraq until the day that he was indeed called up.

Suddenly, the nightmare immediately became real. Gathering up uniforms, equipment, supplies. Saying goodbye to family and friends. Attending a going away ceremony for the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company. I felt like I was floating through my own life, but nothing seemed real. Dad could not really be leaving for Fort Dix, New Jersey, in only a few days.



As we said goodbye to Dad and the rest of the soldiers in the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, I kept myself busy, teaching at Macon Middle School. When Dad deployed, I was preoccupied with adjusting to my new job and teaching throughout the day. Plan lessons. Grade papers. Handle discipline. Complete duties. Plan lessons. Grade papers. John Denver's "Leaving on a Jet Plane" haunted my thoughts. *Cause I'm leavin' on a jet plane... Don't know when I'll be back again... Oh babe, I hate to go.* All these tasks kept my mind and energy preoccupied and helped me keep busy during those long March, April, and May days.



The deployment of the 210<sup>th</sup> to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and later to Iraq affected students across the county who were related in some way to the soldiers. At Macon Middle, I helped Mary Pittman and Gary Roland, school counselors, form a MMS Junior Patriots group for students impacted by the war in Afghanistan or Iraq. Mrs. Pittman met with the students from time to time, during and after school, to discuss their feelings and offer a listening ear. *Where is your relative stationed? How long have they been there? Do you write him or her? Do you worry about him or her? What can we do to help the soldiers from Franklin stationed in Afghanistan or Iraq?*

Mrs. Pittman ordered for each student (plus herself, Mr. Roland, and me) personalized red dog tags that had *Junior Patriots* engraved on them. Students bonded and felt a sense of community and understanding in the midst of tumultuous times. Students got together care packages to send to soldiers in various units and locations. Classes sent letters to soldiers serving in Afghanistan or Iraq. My seventh grade Language Arts classes wrote letters to the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, and they received letters back. Each time a student received a letter from overseas, they were so excited that they could barely get the letter open. I know the soldiers of the 210<sup>th</sup> felt the same way when they received their letters. I was glad to be a part of this experience and to be at Macon Middle School serving as a resource for students, since I was going through the same thing and had been through a similar experience in fifth grade as well.

## Community shows support for soldiers

The Junior Patriots consisted of a group of fifteen students from the sixth to eighth grade. I remember when we stood outside the brick exterior of Macon Middle School to take a picture of our support group to send to the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company and other military units at Christmas. Students clumped together in a group wearing sweatshirts and jeans. Mr. Roland and I stood together on the right end of the group for the photo, while Mrs. Pittman took the photograph. The photo was printed in *The Franklin Press*. I was proud of our group, and I hope that the support of the Junior Patriots—adult and student support—alleviated stress from the lives of the teenagers. I



knew what it was like to live through war as a young girl, so I wanted to be a resource to students in the school who were going through a similar experience.



Dad was deployed to Iraq in June 2003. Mom and I flew to visit him in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the weekend before he had to ship out. Previously, Mom had driven eleven hours from Franklin to Fort Dix, New Jersey, to see Dad with Jerry and Diane Lowe and with Marilyn Garland, who was going to see her husband Larry. This time, the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company did not know for sure when they would leave, but, when rumors of a deployment surfaced, we did not risk Dad leaving before we had seen him. I had flown to England and toured England, France, and Switzerland as a sophomore in college, but Mom had never flown before.

Between my nerves (because I hate to fly) and Mom's nerves (because she was afraid to fly and had promised *never* to fly), we were a nervous wreck on the Delta flight from Hartsfield International Airport in Atlanta (Georgia) to Chicago O'Hare International Airport (Illinois) and then on to Philadelphia International Airport (Pennsylvania). We arrived at Hartsfield (International Airport) later than expected, so

we did not even get to sit together on the plane. We were across the aisle from each other, and Marilyn, a family friend whose husband was in the 210<sup>th</sup> as well, was sitting in the row behind me. I was less nervous for myself than I was for Mom on that flight.

Mom tells the story of being so scared when the airplane took off that she accidentally grabbed the arm of the stranger sitting next to her, instead of the armrest. The gentleman was nice to her and instead of being aggravated about the incident, he patted Mom's arm and told her everything was going to be okay. However, I am not sure he really reassured her. Thankfully, on the plane trip back, Mom and I got to ride together. I got the scare of my life when I fell asleep during the flight. We hit an air pocket during a rain storm, and the turbulence caused the plane to drop several feet. During my sleep, I felt the drop and heard a baby's scream at the same time. I felt like I jumped two feet in the air, but really I just jerked awake. That time, Mom patted my arm and told me everything would be okay.

Dad met us in Philadelphia with Marilyn's husband, Larry. We spent the weekend with Dad. This would be the last time we would see him (before he left for Iraq) for over a year.

## 210th unit heads overseas



Franklin soldiers of the 210th posed at Fort Dix, N.J., shortly before deployment overseas.

The images of the Iraq War bombarded the television newscasts. There were bombings, tanks, more bombings, soldiers injured. Resistance from the Iraqi troops. Shock and Awe Campaign. Explosions. City on fire. Billowing clouds of fire and smoke. Artillery caches bombed. Explosions. Wounded Iraqi civilians. Tanks rolling into Iraqi territory. Saddam Hussein's palaces ransacked and statue toppled. Roadside bombs. Soldier casualties. PFC Jessica Lynch—captured POW during the Battle of Nasiriyah—rescued from Iraqi hospital. Horror stories. Month after month of casualties and nightmare scenarios. Deaths of U.S. troops increased by the day, week, month, and year.

*When will the conflict end? Is there hope for a resolution? Now, in 2009, I am still asking myself the same questions. When will the end of the conflict ever arrive? When will the soldiers come home to their family and friends? When will the horrors of broken lives stop touching the military families?*

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## Community rally for soldiers set for Saturday

Communication with Dad was sparse during the Gulf War. Even though we did not know where Dad was or what he was doing during the Iraq War, we were able to keep in touch with him more easily during that tour of duty. At first (when Dad was sent to New Jersey and then on to Iraq) we sent him letters. Then, he signed up for an email account. Eventually, we were able to talk to him using instant messaging, and he could call us using a satellite phone once he got to Iraq.

I wish that Mom, Jennifer, and I had kept his letters and emails and that he had kept ours, but we did not keep them. I can only say that our letters, emails, instant messages, and phone conversations consisted of us telling him what was going on at home.

*How is school, Jennifer?*

*Okay, Dad. The roads have been slick driving from Franklin to Sylva. I like the Physical Therapy classes, but Anatomy is hard. I am making good grades though.*

*How is teaching, April?*

*Good. You will not believe it, but today a student asked me if I was alive during the Great Depression. They are learning about the Great Depression in research we are doing, and they thought I was there to see it all.*

*How is work, Karon?*

*It has been good. We have a really good class this year. The students ask how you are doing all the time. They told me to tell you Hi.*

*How are things over there, Jerry?*

*About the same. Hot! Everyone is okay though.*

We did not tell Dad any of the negative things that were happening at home, at school, in the broadcasts of CNN or FOX NEWS, or in our daily lives. Instead, we focused on the positive things. I told Dad funny stories from my teaching job. Frequently, students called me by other teachers' names. One time, a student asked me how old I was and then said I was 30. *Can you believe it? I am just 22!* Mom told Dad about stories

from the community—who was getting married, having a baby, opening new stores or restaurants, generating progress in Franklin. Jennifer talked about her classes at Southwestern Community College, her favorite television shows and movies, and her book collection. Even while he was in a foreign country, we all tried to make Dad feel at home.

## *Messages Home: Residents relay news from war*

Still, no communication seemed like enough when Dad was living half-way around the world. Dad said little to nothing about what was going on in Iraq. When he did say something, it was general—about the weather or the supplies we were sending him. The images on the television screen caused me to worry continually about Dad and his fellow soldiers.

I know that my family was constantly thinking and praying for Dad. My prayers went up to heaven inaudibly, because there was no way to put into words what I was thinking and feeling during that time. I did not say the innocent prayer that I had said as a child: *God, please keep Daddy safe and bring him home to us. Bring him home safe to Franklin. I know you will answer this prayer. Amen.* Instead, I said an adult prayer that took into consideration the feelings of others, not just my family. *God, please bring home the members of the 210<sup>th</sup> safely. Please keep them safe from harm while they are in Iraq. Please protect them in all they have to do. Also, please keep Dad safe and please let him call us so we know he is okay. I ask you to please bring Dad home to Franklin and to his family. I thank you for all you are going to do in our lives. Amen.*

While he was gone, we sent Dad packages of Gatorade mixes, cookies, candies, movies, books, a portable DVD and CD player, and CDs. Our packages included items Dad would have wanted if he were at home. We could not send him the mountains, our home, our church, or the memories he was missing, but we could send him special treats to let him know he was missed by his family and friends. We stocked Dad's supplies so high that he had to get rid of stuff when his tour of duty was finally over. He had to give what he had left to other soldiers, because he could not send it home. We would rather he had too much than too little, so far away from us.

## Soldier with 210th group killed in Iraq

When the news came that Staff Sergeant Bobby Franklin had been killed by a roadside bomb, it was a shock to us all. The news hit so close to home, for lack of a fresher way of putting such a harsh reality. Mom, Jennifer, and I felt (but never said out loud) that the bomb could just as readily have hit Dad's convoy. As we attended the memorial service, my heart felt like it was torn asunder. I was so sad for the family who had lost a husband and a father. I also felt guilty because, deep down, I was relieved that it was not Dad. I wished that it had been no one.

*Why would anyone want to kill a complete stranger? Is anything worth bringing that much pain to another?* I asked myself why men and women were dying in Iraq daily. I am not arguing for or against that particular war. Instead, I wonder why the hearts of

men are so dark that they must kill others to feel a sense of victory. I am not talking about the men and women who are defending our nation or fighting for their country. It is the hearts of the terrorists who kill with no other cause than to bring fear that I cannot figure out, no matter how hard I try.

On Christmas day and the days after, we kept sending Dad's packages and our love with them. We waited every day, hoping that we would hear from him. If we heard from him, we knew he was safe for the day. If we did not hear from him, we worried. We waited to hear a potential departure date for the 210<sup>th</sup> from the NC National Guard or the Pentagon. We knew the soldiers wanted to be at home as much as we wanted them to be home. Families began to contact their representatives and senators, hoping to hear good news, or any news for that matter. They kept the phones and mail busy with communications. We knew we must do our part to get our troops home. Families wanted to see their sons, daughters, fathers, wives, and mothers home on American soil again.



My prayers went up, as they still do, for the soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. I know that each man or woman is important to their families and friends back home. *God, please bring home the members of the 210<sup>th</sup> safely. Please keep them safe from harm while they are in Iraq. Please protect them in all they have to do. Also, please keep Dad safe and please let him call us so we know he is okay. I ask you to please bring Dad home to Franklin and to his family. I thank you for all you are going to do in our lives. Amen.* So, I continue daily, praying and hoping for a safe homecoming for others, as I did for Dad the year that he was stationed in Iraq.

The load of the worry is sometimes unbearable. The only thing that gave me peace during the years 2003-2004 was my faith. I am thankful for the peace that I felt even during the hardest of times. I learned a valuable lesson about myself and my family during those days. I could not only face another struggle with war myself, but I could also help others who were facing the same problems. Love gave me strength to withstand my personal struggles and keep looking for the day Dad would come home again. Once again, my faith sustained me from losing all hope.



## CHAPTER 6: WHERE I COME FROM

During fall and winter 2003, I spent many hours watching the news and waiting for a breakthrough—any change. It was frustrating, waiting during those long days. Many teenagers in Franklin spend their whole young lives restless, waiting to get out of Franklin. I believe I can safely say that most of these teenagers identified with “Who Says You Can’t Go Home,” a hit song of Bon Jovi and Jennifer Nettles. *I spent twenty years tryin’ to get outta this place... I was lookin’ for something I couldn’t replace... I was runnin’ from the only thing I’ve ever known.*

Instead, I was happy just where I was living, and I was waiting to hear news of Dad getting to come home. Then, the families of the 210<sup>th</sup> heard rumors of a possible extension of the tour of duty of the reservists. I wanted to hear any news—except hearing that Dad would be in Iraq longer. Family members of the 210<sup>th</sup> were still writing letters and calling their representatives, senators, and the governor.

## **Families, soldiers disappointed over possible extension**

During this stagnant period of waiting and watching, Representative Charles Taylor visited the families of the 210<sup>th</sup> in Andrews, North Carolina. He said that he had been in Iraq and that he would lobby to get the 210<sup>th</sup> back home, but he did not promise a

date. I could empathize with him on one point—his own son would be going to Iraq soon. Mom, Jennifer, my aunt, Teresa, and I drove to Andrews to hear what Representative Taylor had to say, but we felt let down by the conversation. No one seemed to want to promise a departure date and all clues seemed to indicate that the 210<sup>th</sup> would be staying in Iraq longer than expected.

On September 22, 2003, Poppy Vinson went in for heart catheterization at Mission Memorial Hospital in Asheville, North Carolina. The doctor found that Poppy needed more than catheterization and kept him overnight. The next morning, Poppy had five bypasses in the Heart Center of Memorial Mission. He tried to make them promise not to give him any blood during the surgery, but that was impossible. Hours later, Poppy was in ICU, with a multitude of tubes keeping him stable.

Later on that day, the doctor found that Poppy was bleeding internally, so he had to go back into surgery to stop the bleeding. Before the second surgery began, the doctor told us if we—Mamaw, Teresa, Ronnie, Mom, Jennifer, and I—wanted to see Poppy, we could see him immediately in ICU. I went up with Mamaw, Mom, Teresa, and Ronnie to see Poppy. Jennifer stayed behind with Aunt Janet, Dad's sister. Not only was Poppy hooked up to machines so that he did not even look like himself, but he was so pale, he looked almost blue.

Mom and I started crying, because we did not know how the surgery would turn out. Teresa and Ronnie were holding themselves together to help Mamaw downstairs. Even though she is one of the strongest people I know, I do not know how Mom handled Poppy's surgery and recovery while worrying about Dad in Iraq as well. Thankfully, Dad

was able to call on his satellite phone that day, so I think that helped Mom more than anything.

Robert Dryman, the pastor of Cartoogechaye Church of God (where Dad, Mom, Jennifer and I had attended church since 1997), came that day to pray with us and was with us during the second surgery as well. I remember kneeling down in the hospital chapel, praying for Poppy to survive the surgery and to recover from it. Brother Dryman was a comfort to our family during that crisis and many others. Anytime that anybody needed him, Brother Dryman was there.

Poppy came through the second surgery and the bleeding was stopped. He had to have even more blood, but he was alive. Mom, Jennifer, and I helped Mamaw and Teresa take care of Poppy and nurse him back to health in the many months after. His father, Frank Vinson, lived to be 104 and laid rock walls until he was in his eighties. It was a slow process, but Poppy Vinson finally got back to his usual healthy self.

It was a breath of fresh air then when Mom, Jennifer, and I finally got word that the 210<sup>th</sup> would be home in June 2004. We had a date to look forward to, but a lot could happen in two months on the dangerous streets of Iraq. The sooner, the better was my point of view during those days when roadside bombs, convoy attacks, and backpack bombs seemed to happen every day and were reported on the daily news.

I worried each day that something dreadful would happen before the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup>, and especially Dad, would make it home. My worst nightmare came in mid-April when we received word that the 210<sup>th</sup> might have an extended tour of service in Iraq, but thankfully, a week later, we found out that the 210<sup>th</sup> would come home in June 2004 after all.



Mom had bronchitis all winter and spring, leading up to Dad's homecoming. She could not get rid of the congestion and coughing with doctor-prescribed antibiotics. Doctor Wilde said she had walking pneumonia and wanted to hospitalize her, but she refused. Instead, a week before Dad returned, Mom began using a nebulizer to clear the fluid from her lungs. Exhale all air. Insert mouthpiece. Inhale for three seconds. Take out mouthpiece. Hold ten seconds. Exhale deeply. Insert mouthpiece. Inhale for three seconds. Hold ten seconds. Exhale deeply. Continue for five minutes. This may seem like an easy process, but it became more difficult when she was coughing and gasping for breath while simultaneously trying to hold her breath so that the medication could reach her respiratory system.

**Community  
welcomes the  
210th home**

I can still see Mom, standing on the blacktop at the Asheville Airport's hangar, waiting for Dad's C-130 to land so we could take him home. On June 10, the afternoon sun was hot and the blacktop amplified the heat tenfold. Mom, Jennifer, and I stood there, sweating in the sun, along with Dad's other family members and friends—Poppy and Mamaw Vinson; Homer and Teresa Holbrooks; Ellis and Sandra Anderson; Steve, Sharon, Kaitlyn, and Clinton Anderson; Janet Anderson; Christine Hurst; Jerry and Diane Lowe—and other families, all waiting for our loved ones.

Between Mom's coughing and the heat, she came near to fainting as she waited for the planes to land. We wanted to find her somewhere to sit down in the shade inside the hangar, but she would not hear of it. Instead, she wanted to stand in the front row of the crowded tarmac and see Dad when he walked off the plane. No amount of convincing, arguing, or bribing could get Mom off her spot on the *front lines*. I was afraid we would have to take her to the hospital because of her walking pneumonia and because of what I was afraid would be heat exhaustion. She would not hear any warnings; she would be the first one to see Dad get off of that C-130.

The crowd was loud and excited. If the 210<sup>th</sup> could have seen the crowd from their arriving planes, they would have seen a painting of red, white and blue, almost like an American flag formed by their patriotic wives, children, mothers, fathers, and friends. I cannot imagine what the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup> were thinking as they were flying into Asheville, North Carolina, still seventy-five miles and an hour and a half from home.

*Were the men and women thinking about the war zone they had left behind? Were they thinking about their family and friends waiting for them? Were they thinking about the past, present, or future? Were they wondering how they would be greeted? Even if I*

had asked Dad, I could never truly grasp what he was thinking. It is one of those moments that I imagine words would not do justice. Only the words *thankful* and *blessed* come to mind when I think of the men and women who came home from Iraq that June day.

Then I think of the multitudes of men and women who did not make it home because their unit had a last minute extension, because they were injured, or because they lost their lives. I think of Staff Sergeant Bobby Franklin. I think of the men and women I see on the nightly news five years later who are still losing their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. *How would it feel to answer a knock at your door and hear that a son or daughter, father or mother, husband or wife, had lost their life?* I cannot imagine.



I cannot put into words my conflicting emotions on June 10, when Dad came home, so I will not put into words the feelings of others. I will not trivialize their loss or their victory. Instead, I will say that I felt a mixture of happiness, sadness, fear, and

excitement that day. I was happy that Dad was going to be at home with us again and continue his life. I was sad for those who were lost or left behind. I was afraid that I would not have words to communicate to Dad how much I had missed him and how glad I was that he was home. He had missed so much of my first and second years of teaching. There were so many memories, positive and negative, to share. *How would I begin?* At the same time, though, I was excited to tell Dad all, just like my childhood self who had been ready to teach him something I had learned at school. I felt like a child instead of an adult that day.

Two C-130s flew into the airport within minutes of one another, one with an American flag and one with a North Carolina flag waving from their roofs. Those planes were a beautiful sight. Even though I dread flying, I thanked God for airplanes that day. Later, Dad told us that the flight out of Iraq was the worst. The military plane had to leave Iraq at full speed and had to fly in a zigzag pattern to keep from being hit by artillery below. I cannot imagine the flight into Kuwait after that kind of take-off. Once the 210<sup>th</sup> were in Kuwait, they were busy cleaning and loading equipment to leave for the United States. They flew out of Kuwait approximately a week later. The men and women must have been sitting on the edge of their seats during their refueling in Ireland and until they reached American soil. The 210<sup>th</sup> flew into McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey, and were processed out at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Finally, they landed in Asheville, North Carolina.

When the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup> left the C-130 and walked toward the crowd in their desert uniforms, the crowd burst into a simultaneous cheer and ran toward their family member or friend walking toward them. The homecoming moment was a

chaos of hugs, kisses, crying, laughing, and cheering for at least the next half-hour. Dad told us that he had kissed the ground when he landed in New Jersey and that when he saw the mountains on his flight into Asheville it brought tears of thankfulness to his eyes for being home.

*What do you say in moments of true joy? Is there anything that can express your feelings? I do not remember precisely what anyone said, except the usual conversations of homecomings. I love you. You look good. How was your flight? We are glad to have you home. You have grown. Look how big you have gotten. I missed you. Do you know Daddy? Do you know Mommy? I prayed for you. Thank you for your prayers.*

I was so overwhelmed that I do not remember what Mom, Jennifer, I, or anyone else said to Dad that day. Thankfully, Gary Gooder of the *Macon County News* reported on that day. For the rest of us, it was a blur. The quoted bits of conversation are from the *Macon County News* on June 17, 2004, but my feelings are as I remember them.





After the initial welcome, all of the families made their way inside the hangar. The hangar was impersonal, except for the patriotic decorations set up for that day: balloons, yellow ribbons, and the flags of the United States and North Carolina. In the front of the hangar, a stage was set up for the ceremony's dignitaries (who came to Asheville to welcome the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company home and honor the men and women for their service): Governor Michael Easley and Mrs. Easley, Representative Charles Taylor, Major General William Ingram and Mrs. Ingram (of the North Carolina National Guard), and Captain Thomas Lewis III (Commanding Officer of the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company). The rest of the hangar was set up in rows of steel chairs on a concrete floor in front of the stage. At the side of the room, tables held an assortment of snack food for after the ceremony.

Governor Easley began the ceremony in Hangar Seven by saying, *Welcome home; you don't know how good you look today.*

Governor Easley did not know how correct he was, because, even though Dad looked thinner and fatigued, he still looked wonderful to us on that day. I remembered back to my primary school years when Dad used to hold me up in front of the mirror and ask, *Who is the fairest one of all?* Today, I would definitely say, *you are, Dad.* His sacrifice and his safe homecoming were on my mind, and he was a hero in my eyes.

Governor Easley commended the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company for their service, saying: *Your courage, your strength, and your commitment and sacrifice have made you a vanguard of freedom around the world. I know deployment has been difficult for you and your families, and I know not all of you came home. You make us*

*proud to be Americans; you make us proud to be North Carolinians. We love you; we're glad to have you home.*

Easley's reference to Staff Sergeant Bobby Franklin—of the Murphy unit of the 210<sup>th</sup>—struck us all into silence and reflection. One was missing from the celebration. We all knew his sacrifice was the greatest of all the soldiers, families, and friends who had suffered during the year and three months of deployment, first in Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then in Iraq. I do not believe I will ever forget Staff Sergeant Franklin's sacrifice, and I will never know the extent to which the men and women who served with him still feel the loss. *What did they feel the day that they lost one of their own?* During their service, they lost a brother. All I know for sure is that the memory of their lost comrade caused a perceptible silence during the joy-filled ceremony that day.

Charles Taylor, then U.S. Representative of the 11<sup>th</sup> District of Western North Carolina, gave Captain Thomas Lewis III, the Commander of the 210<sup>th</sup>, an American flag that had once hung over the capital in Raleigh.

He told Captain Lewis and the 210<sup>th</sup>, *We thank you for your sacrifice...and our prayers were answered.*

I can verify Representative Taylor's claim that many prayers went up for the 210<sup>th</sup>. He did not know that I had prayed the same prayer for over a year: *God, please bring home the members of the 210<sup>th</sup> safely. Please keep them safe from harm while they are in Iraq. Please protect them in all they have to do. Also, please keep Dad safe and please let him call us so we know he is okay. I ask you to please bring Dad home to Franklin and to his family. I thank you for all you are going to do in our lives. Amen.*

Even though we all suffered and made sacrifices, our prayers were answered on that day in June. The 210<sup>th</sup> were now on North Carolina soil again and on their way home to Franklin, Murphy, or Sylva. We all were sitting in anxious anticipation for the ceremony to end so that we could spend more time with our families. There was so much to say and to do for those who had missed so much during the last year.

Mrs. Ingram, the wife of the Adjutant General of the North Carolina National Guard, spoke about the unity of the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company: *There was a band of brothers in Iraq and a band of sisters at home. I am so proud of this family support group.*

During the Iraq War, one consolation that Mom, Jennifer, and I had was the people of Franklin, who stood beside us during the waiting, encouraged us during the questioning, and comforted us during the hurting. I believe that a portion of the unity that the 210<sup>th</sup> and their families experienced came from the selflessness of the Western North Carolina region. We would not leave one struggling while the rest of us strove on. No. We would carry the struggling along with us to the dawn at the end of the struggle.

Next, the Adjutant General of the North Carolina National Guard, Major General William Ingram, welcomed back the 210<sup>th</sup> MP Company, who are part of the over 12,000 guard soldiers in North Carolina. Ingram said the return of the 210<sup>th</sup> *was a long time in coming. You are the best of the best, great citizen-soldiers.* When addressing the families of the 210<sup>th</sup>, he told them about the duties of the soldiers, including patrolling, guarding, transporting, and escorting. In reference to Staff Sergeant Bobby Franklin, he said, *[He] gave all of his tomorrows so that we might be free today.*

This speech received applause from the audience, who were by this time wiggling in their seats. The antsy state of the spectators was not due to rudeness or boredom; it was

due to excitement. The men, women, husbands, wives, children, fathers, mothers, and other family and friends were anticipating one-on-one time with their respective husband, wife, children, father, mother, family member, or friend. We wanted to be free to reminisce in private.

Captain Thomas Lewis III, Commander of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, started his speech by announcing, *We're home!*

I burst out into screams and clapping, along with all of those around me. That one sentence summed up how we were all feeling. There was nothing else we needed to know that day—except that our loved ones were with us.

Captain Lewis continued and ended the ceremony on this note: *I'll be brief because it is almost Baghdad hot here...Our year of living dangerously is over...This is a beautiful place. God bless North Carolina...[Soldiers] may tell you some of the things, but some of the things they've seen are hard and they won't be able to talk about them...The 210<sup>th</sup> will be remembered, I can promise you that. We're a unique organization; we tend to make a statement everywhere we go. We're a little bit older than most soldiers and we talk funny. They found that fascinating...And we travel with our own musicians. A couple brought their guitars and one played the bagpipes. We became theatre famous.*

I knew that Captain Lewis understood the anticipation and the fear in all of us sitting there. He reminded us that he felt like any other soldier in his charge—glad to be home in Western North Carolina, whether it be Asheville, Franklin, Andrews, Murphy, or Sylva. The families waiting for the return of the 210<sup>th</sup> had hoped and prayed for their

return, had wished that we could send the mountains to the men and women stationed in Iraq, and had had our prayers answered.

Indeed, the mountains and the atmosphere of Western North Carolina are beyond description. It is home to my family. I could not imagine living anywhere else. There is more to life than business and traffic, than malls and entertainment, than individuality and loneliness. I would rather feel like I belong in a small town than be one among hundreds of thousands in a booming city. I trust that on June 10 the mountains of Western North Carolina never looked better to the men and women who were finally home.

Captain Lewis knew the experiences of a soldier are rarely, but painfully, shared. When asked about them, Dad seldom wants to talk about his experiences in Iraq. In fact, he usually changes the subject, even when the current state of the war is brought up. Part of me wishes I knew what it was like to be in a war zone, but the larger part of me does not want to cause Dad pain and is afraid to know what the soldiers went through during their tours of duty. The scenes on CNN, NBS, and FOX NEWS cannot do justice to the truth of war.

The fact that the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup> were individuals set apart from others did not surprise those who knew them. Instead, we laughed at the day's allusions to their dialects, their musicians, and their fame. Mom and I had had a small experience with this notoriety when we traveled to Philadelphia to visit Dad when he was stationed at Fort Dix Air Force Base, New Jersey. While we were waiting for Dad to make it to Philadelphia on leave, Mom and I went to K-Mart and began talking to one another. When other customers walked by and heard us, they would ask where we were from.

After awhile, Mom told me: *The next time someone asks us where we are from, I'm going to tell them Mars—just to see what they will say.* I can imagine how different the dialect of the men and women in the 210<sup>th</sup> must have been when compared to other soldiers and the Iraqi forces.

At the end of the ceremony, Purple Hearts were given to six men who were hurt while on duty and to the family of Staff Sergeant Bobby Franklin who was killed while on duty. Then there were refreshments for families who wished to stay and socialize. Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and I said our goodbyes and left with our friends and family. I drove my Mazda Tribute from the Asheville Airport to Cartoogechaye community (where we lived in Franklin), making a brief stop at Burger King to eat lunch.

*What was it like to walk in your own home for the first time in over a year?* I do not know. The longest I have been away from Franklin was during undergraduate school at Western Carolina University, and even then I could come home for the weekend if I wanted to visit with my family. Everything must have seemed new and refreshing to Dad. For example, he could: sleep in his own bed; turn on the air conditioner or heater; take a shower when he wanted; have clean, hot water; drink spring water; find fresh food in the refrigerator; choose from a closet of clothes; not wear a uniform; not shine his boots; keep track of his family and friends, and enjoy freedom.

Fourth of July that year was filled with excessive, patriotic fanfare. People sat all over the hills that surrounded the baseball field above Macon County Recreational Park. As people stood up to buy ice cream, hot dogs, frozen drinks, and popcorn, the hill looked like a red, white, and blue wave. Dusk began to fall and children pulled out glow-sticks, which lighted their way back and forth across the hill. Lawn chairs and blankets

were scattered across the hill and on the flat area below. The bleachers filled up with people.

Patriotic music, '50s songs, bluegrass instrumentals, and gospel hymns floated through the air. The well-known song of Lee Greenwood, "God Bless the U.S.A.," resounded through the activities. *If tomorrow all the things were gone, ... I'd worked for all my life... And I had to start again, ... with just my children and my wife.* Prizes were given away for chances. Children danced in the grass as the music played. All around, I saw groups of people huddled together with family and friends.

At the end of the day, Tony Angel, representative from the Chamber of Commerce, and the people of Franklin paid tribute to the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, including a slide show and music. A young girl presented Dad with a camouflage bear to show the men and women of the 210<sup>th</sup> how much the people of Franklin appreciated them.



After the ceremony, it was dark enough for the fireworks to begin. There were a variety of red, purple, orange, green, and gold blasts in the sky as music flooded the air. Ray Charles sang his famous rendition of “America the Beautiful.” *America! America!... God shed his grace on thee... And crown thy good with brotherhood... From sea to shining sea!*

As the fireworks went off, flare after flare, the crowd watched intently. I heard: *Oooh, Ahhh. Did you see that? Wow!* Finally, there was the climax of the fireworks display with flash after flash lighting up the sky. In the end, a surprise was pulled out—flares in the shape and colors of the American flag. The flares looked like they were cascading down in fountains of red, silver, and blue. As I watched the *flag* burn out, tears came to my eyes and I thought about how wonderful a tribute Franklin had given to the 210<sup>th</sup>. I was so thankful Dad was home and could enjoy this Fourth of July with us.

The months ahead were filled with family time. Work went on as usual. Life went on as usual. Now Dad could be a part of our daily lives again. No more watching the daily news. I could choose to watch the news if I wanted to, but I did not feel captured by the news anymore. I could teach and not worry what news I would get when I got home. I could think of things like graduate school and career goals.

No one can know how much war affects your day-to-day life until they have a close family member or friend in a war zone. Then, war becomes an antagonist and you are glad to be free from the conflict. I wish this freedom from conflict to all the families and friends who have someone serving in Iraq or Afghanistan. Until then, my prayers will be with them and the soldiers who are serving their country at this very moment.



## CHAPTER 7: AT HOME

Dad and Mom are sitting in the front seat of the maroon Pontiac. We are coming home from eating supper. I am seven and Jennifer is four. *Can you tell me how to get home?* Dad asks me.

*Take a left at the red light,* I tell him.

*What next?* Mom asks.

*Drive past Hardees and go left at the intersection next to East Franklin Elementary School.*

*Okay. Where to?* Dad prompts.

*Drive straight. Keep driving straight. Take a right at Town Mountain Estates.*

*Good. Now what?* Mom inquires.

*Drive up the hill. Keep straight ahead. Now take a left and the second house on the left.*

*Very good. We're home,* Dad confirms.

Dad and Mom taught me not only *where* home was, but also *what* home was at an early age. *Home* was where we lived. I could find the location. However, home was also the connection with my family. Even when Dad was overseas, he was still a part of us. When he returned, though, I appreciated the intricacies of home even more. Instead of causing distance between Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and me, our separation only brought us closer. I knew what it was to have a nuclear and extended family. However, as I developed into a teenager, I also knew what it was to be separated from and to lose those I loved. I was blessed by a Dad and Mom who were at home every morning when I woke up. I was thankful for the suppers I sat down to eat with Dad, Mom, and Jennifer. As an

adult, the Iraq War and the loss of loved ones made me value my family and my home even more. I am grateful for every moment.

As a child and now as an adult, I have often watched a butterfly flutter through the air or skate across a gravel parking lot and have been surprised by the amazing beauty and frailty of the insect. Through my personal interest in butterflies, I have learned that they go through four stages of appearance and purpose in their lives. First, I may look upon a leaf and see a tiny, round egg. A female, adult butterfly has attached this egg near to food so that the soon-emerging caterpillar will have a means of survival. During the next stage of development, I may notice a caterpillar, which looks like a long, and sometimes multi-colored, worm. Even though not yet a butterfly, the caterpillar often has a unique pattern of stripes or patches. Through its third stage, I may observe that the chrysalis transforms the caterpillar into the adult butterfly. The cocoon-like formation is usually brown or green and camouflages the still-forming insect. In the fourth stage, I may witness a fully-formed, adult butterfly, colorful and unique in its maturity. The butterfly is now able to reproduce and migrate; it engages in courting, mating, egg-laying, migrating, and colonizing.

Ever since I was a young girl, I have had a fascination with butterflies. I am intrigued by this insect with such a short life-span (two to six weeks as an adult butterfly except in the fourth generation), such a singular life cycle, and a beautiful, intricate appearance. The monarch is one of the most studied butterflies and is well-known for its migration. The monarch cannot survive in cold weather, so the butterflies migrate to the warmer climates of California or Mexico in October. The migration of the monarchs is

the longest of any insect, 2,500 miles. Even more interesting is their life cycle during migration.

In February or March, the monarch butterfly stirs from hibernating, finds a mate, and begins its journey from Mexico or southern California to the northern United States or Canada. Butterflies that have lasted four or five months through winter hibernation lay their eggs when they arrive. In northern parts of the United States or Canada, the first, second, and third generations of the monarch butterfly go through the process of egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, and adult butterfly from March to August. In September and October, though, the fourth generation is born. These butterflies go through the four stages of life, and then they migrate back to southern California or Mexico. They live for six to eight months and hibernate for the winter. Though the fourth generation has never been to their former relatives' habitat, they return to the same trees as their predecessors. The fourth generation awakens in the spring, lays eggs for yet another generation, and dies shortly thereafter. The cycle of the butterfly is amazing. *Home* is innate in these insects and they know where they belong, based on the season and the weather.

Similarly, I believe that the chaotic seasons in my life have helped me to develop into the person I am today. When Dad was stationed overseas during the Persian Gulf and Iraq Wars, my feelings about the home front were solidified. I do not believe *home* can be found in a building alone. Instead, I consider *home* to be where (or when) I feel the most secure and accepted. Fortunately, I do feel safe and valued in my family and my home. However, I have found home's most outstanding aspect—refuge—not in another person or in a particular place, but in coming to terms with myself and my own faith.

When I look at myself, I see a woman who worries too much, works too hard, and takes things too seriously plenty of the time. I am a person who tries for perfection, even though it can never be reached. At times, I am even an individual who lacks a substantial amount of self-confidence or pride. At the same time, I am a person who cares about others and listens to their problems. I am a Christian who prays for others. I am an inquisitive person who thinks about, then studies, to find the answers to questions. I am a person who wants the best for others and would rather give to others than gain something myself. I feel that I am a person of contradictions, but maybe everyone feels the same way about themselves. Every day I feel that I am a little less of a contradiction and a little more of the person who I want to become. It is a continuing process to be at *home* with the person who I am becoming each day: a good daughter and sister, a caring and trustworthy friend, a constantly developing teacher, a Sunday school teacher for teens at Cartoogechaye Church of God, an inquisitive thinker with a vivid imagination, a scholar of books, and a woman of faith.

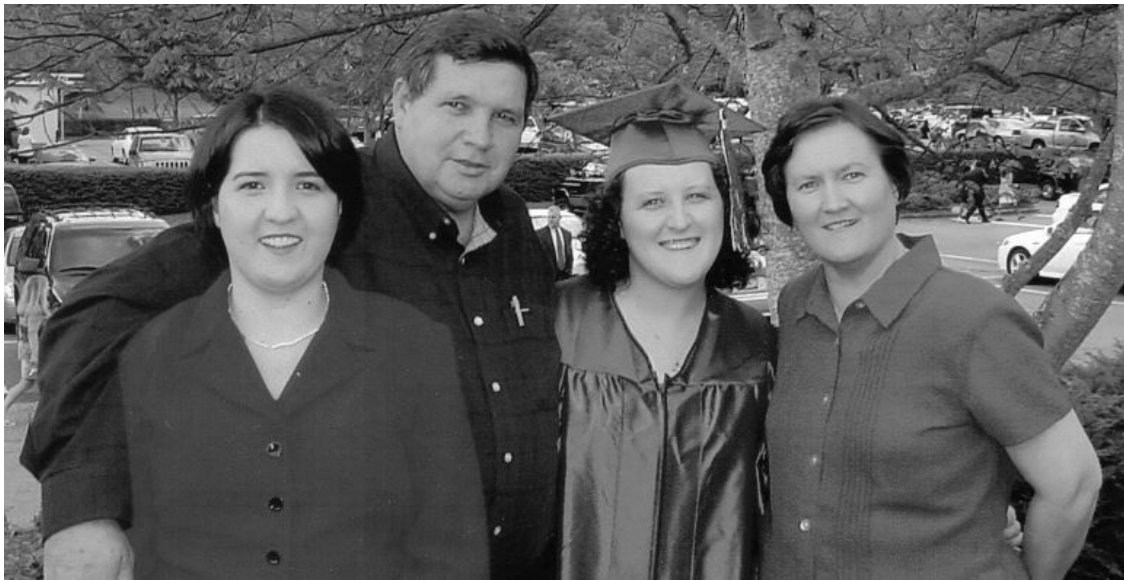
One of my favorite songs, “Roots Before Branches,” by Room for Two points out the importance of *home*: *I gotta have... Roots before branches... To know who I am... Before I know... Who I wanna be... And faith... To take chances... To live like I see... A place in this world... For me.* I feel that my *home* created a solid foundation that has helped to make me the person that I am today. *Home* means my country—the United States; my state—North Carolina; my county—Macon; my town—Franklin. *Home* is the house that I live in among the mountains of the Cartoogechaye community.

Also, I feel *at home* among the family and friends who make me feel safe and comfortable. My faith gives me peace and a feeling of belonging, even despite the

problems of life. I feel another aspect of *home*—safety—from many sources in my life.

*Home* occurs when I feel a sense of peace with the woman I am, with where I am, and with what I am doing. I consider myself *at home* when I am content with my life, not when I am dreaming about a new goal.

I fully realized the importance of *home* during the times when my *home front* was threatened or altered. When Dad was on his tours of duty in Saudi Arabia and Iraq during the Persian Gulf and Iraq Wars, I figured out the core value of my *home*—my family. As Poppy Vinson lay in the ICU of Mission Memorial Hospital, I knew that I should appreciate every moment with my family. When Poppy Anderson passed away, I understood how short and unpredictable life was and valued every precious moment. After Jennifer graduated from Southwestern Community College in 2005 with a degree in Health Information Technology, I realized how quickly time passed by.



On October 27, 2006, I stood in the receiving line for friends after Mamaw Anderson, Annie Lou Anderson, passed away and I felt heartbroken. I could only think of

the times when Mamaw had been a perfect example of love for her children (David, Ellis, Jerry, Paul, Jane, Janet, and Patricia), her grandchildren (Steve, Charles, Jennifer, Will, Jonathan, and me), and great-grandchildren (Clinton and Kaitlyn). A few days earlier, on October 25, Mamaw passed away. I still could not believe that she was no longer with her family.

During visitation, many friends came with condolences for the family, and several of them were my friends and co-workers at Macon Middle School. I will always appreciate the cards, flowers, and encouragement that my friends gave me during that evening and for weeks after. My partners at school, Michelle Maslin, Monica Miller, and Sheila Snyder, sent me flowers, gave me a card, and brought cards that my students had written to me. Many friends walked through to support me as well: Colette Lovell, Sharon McConnell, Karen Wiggins, Kathy Parker, Susan Diez, Vivian Honey, and others. When Sharon McConnell hugged me and handed me a white handkerchief with flowers embroidered on it, it meant so much to me. It was such a thoughtful gift that tears of thankfulness flowed down my cheeks. These small gestures during the distressing day were priceless.

During the memorial service on October 28, while Reverends Robert Dryman and Carson Gibson were speaking, I recalled past memories. I recollected times such as these: Mamaw hugs and kisses Jennifer and me. Mamaw always makes sure we get plenty to eat. Poppy Anderson and I are the first ones to the table when I am a young girl, and Mamaw always has a spread of food: stewed beef or ham, fried potatoes, cream corn, green beans. *April is so smart*, she brags to my great-uncle, Ed Waldroop. All the good

times of family gatherings at Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and birthdays flooded my mind, including presents, stories, laughter, and discussions. Love filled the house.

The days following the funeral and burial I began to re-prioritize my life. I minimized extra duties at work. I spent precious time with Dad, Mom, and Jennifer. Losing Mamaw Anderson was difficult on the entire family. Through the heartbreak, though, I believed Mamaw was in heaven, so I had peace about the loss. Nevertheless, I began to focus on making the most of my life. I wanted to feel content with my life, and I was not content with the steady stream of work and fatigue in my life at that moment. I began to value my personal home front again.

After the loss, I looked at my hometown once again. I remembered how proud I am to live in Franklin, in the midst of the Smoky Mountains. I believe Franklin is more beautiful than any place I have ever been. I have traveled to several places (Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Pennsylvania, Chicago, Washington, Oregon, California, England, France, and Switzerland), but none of them is as special to me as my hometown in Macon County. Every fall, I watch with anticipation as the leaves begin to be tinged by red, yellow, orange, or brown, and then it is time for Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and me to take our annual trip to Nantahala to enjoy the splendor of the color among the mountains. During my drive home to Cartoogechaye, I know it is time for the trip when the burning bushes transform into bright crimson shrubs, forming a barrier in the middle of I-65 West. I wait with anticipation for this tradition.

My family home lies in a valley surrounded by rolling hills. When I was seventeen, Dad, Mom, Jennifer and I moved from Town Mountain Estates to a new home in Cartoogechaye Community. In Cherokee, *Cartoogechaye* means a *new settlement*

*place*. Our home was exactly that for my family. We were completely content with the move. Our house is two stories tall and forty feet wide by seventy-seven feet long. It is covered by light gray vinyl siding.

I see the carport as I drive down the last three-tenths of a mile toward my house. Behind the house, I sometimes look out the glass picture window in the kitchen onto a hillside lined with trees. Alongside the hill, a natural spring runs out and over tree roots and rocks that stick up from the soil. In front of the house, I stand on the porch and see a sloping front yard with a Bradford pear tree, two peach trees, a redbud tree, and a weeping cherry tree. At the far end of the house, I see an oval pond filled with rainbow trout. The trout follow me around the pond as I throw food along the edge of the water. I stop and they stop. They churn the water like piranhas, waiting for the first bite of food.

Often, I see deer or turkey cross the gravel driveway on the 1.3 miles that twists and turns like a rollercoaster, leading down to the house. After entering the gravel driveway from I-65 West, a deer might spontaneously stop in its tracks on the flat piece of land at the top of the road that is shaded by towering poplar and red maple trees. The deer stands and seems to stare at me. It does not fear me or my vehicle. It continues to eat contentedly in this flat area.

Another time, as I am driving within fifteen feet of the driveway with Dad, Mom, and Jennifer after the Sunday night church service, we spotted a black bear, weighing approximately 225 pounds and dragging Cody's dog food across the carport. *She is taking it to her cubs*, we say to one another. When she sees my Mazda Tribute approaching, she leaves the bag of Purina Dog Chow on the carport, runs down the hill adjacent to the carport, and lopes across the front yard into the woods. Cody sneaks out



from under Dad's and Mom's Chevrolet Silverado. Since Cody is twelve years old, he is slower than he was as a puppy when my Aunt Teresa rescued him from a sack thrown into her creek in Burningtown community. Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and I listen for the bear to return, but she does not come back that night.

Not only is the beauty of Franklin captivating, but I am thankful for the progress made in Franklin. Even though friends and family are still the focal point of my hometown, Franklin now has additional opportunities for culture. In July 2009, Franklin gained a brand-new, state-of-the-art theatre, Smoky Mountain Center for the Performing Arts. Various entertainers have performed, such as Chonda Pierce, Christian comedian; The Isaacs, bluegrass gospel group; and Overlook Theatre Company, local drama organization. In the past five years, Fatz Café, Sonic Drive-In, Kenny G's, and Main Street Pizzeria have opened in Franklin as well. I enjoy the new places available in my hometown, but no amount of progress can replace the beauty of the mountains or the empathy of the people of Franklin. I am very fortunate to have family and friends who care about the people around them. This is my *home*—the place where I belong.

As a result of the Persian Gulf and Iraq Wars, Dad must have fashioned a *home* while overseas. He could not have felt peace otherwise. He formed friendships in Saudi Arabia and Iraq with his fellow soldiers. He found comfort in his Christian faith. He found a way to compartmentalize being away from Mom, Jennifer, and me so that he could form a temporary home overseas.

Meanwhile, Mom, Jennifer, and I were redefining *home—home* without Dad. During the Gulf War, Jennifer was too young to know the extent to which our home was changed during those six months. She only knew that Mom kept our lives as normal as

possible. While Dad was gone, Jennifer and I still went to school, enjoyed games after school, and visited with family. However, throughout the deployment of the 210<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company during the Iraq War, I realized how much Dad's tour of duty created a vacancy in our home. I watched the news and saw Dad in harm's way, instead of enjoying his life with his family. I created a connection with Dad through my faith, especially through my prayers.

In 2003 and 2004, Dad was separated from us for a longer period of time during the Iraq War, almost fifteen months. While Dad was stationed in Iraq, I knew where my home was, who I was, and where I belonged. Mom, Jennifer, and I had our family home in Franklin. I had my job at Macon Middle School and was comforted by helping other students whose homes had also been affected.

Regardless, even with my job as a distraction and with family and friends to support me, I was not able to completely reconcile or fill the gap left by our separation. Instead, I relied on my faith even more during the Iraq War. I found encouragement through the prayers and the uplifting words of the members of Cartoogechaye Church of God. Also, my prayers gave me peace in the midst of the danger facing Dad and the members of the 210<sup>th</sup>. My prayers had developed from the simple prayer of my childhood—*God, please keep Daddy safe and bring him home to us. Bring him home safe to Franklin. I know you will answer this prayer. Amen.* Now, my prayer was more thoughtful—*God, please bring home the members of the 210<sup>th</sup> safely. Please keep them safe from harm while they are in Iraq. Please protect them in all they have to do. Also, please keep Dad safe and please let him call us so we know he is okay. I ask you to please bring Dad home to Franklin and to his family. I thank you for all you are going to do in*

*our lives. Amen.* However, the words I chose were not important. It was the faith behind the prayer that gave me peace and helped me to uphold my idea of *home*.

Oliver Wendell Holmes (physician, lecturer, and author) depicted *home* closest to my personal definition. Holmes described *home* in the following way: *Where we love is home—home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.* I do not define *home* solely as a place of safety and belonging. I also believe being *at home* means feeling you are loved and accepted by your family and friends. I am fortunate to be encouraged by my family and friends in every pursuit. I feel accepted for the person that I am, through my religious beliefs, and despite my failures, faults, or insecurities. The network of people who provide a place of refuge for me is so intricate that I could never share enough about these individuals.

I feel *at home* among my family, no matter the distance between us. I know that no matter where I go or what I do, I can depend on Dad and Mom, Jerry and Karon Anderson, and my sister, Jennifer. Grandparents—F.B. and Helena Vinson and Turner and Annie Anderson—have loved me. Aunts—Gail, Janet, Jane, Marie, Patricia, Sherry, Sandra, and Teresa—have listened, and uncles—David, Ellis, Gary, Homer, Paul, and Ronnie—have joked. Cousins—Ashley, Katelyn, Steve, Charlie, Will, and Jonathan—have played an important part in my developing into the person I am today.

Friends throughout my life have influenced me as a person—friends from school, college, work, church, and the community. Instead of just walking in and out of my life, I have made lifelong friends who are more than just strangers. These friends have become like members of my family—part of my feeling *at home*. I know that I could call Henry and Linda Wall, Angela Ramsey, Levourn and Karen Wiggins, or Sharon McConnell just

to talk or to share a need. They have prepared meals for me, said prayers for me, sent encouragement to me, and shared wisdom with me.

I could call my pastor, Phillip Cochran, and his wife, Crystal, to ask for prayers, to seek advice, or to share ideas at any time, since they are influential and trusted friends. Whenever my family has needed them, they have been right there. Their children, Gracie and Elijah, are inspirational in their love of people and enthusiasm for life. Whether it is singing in church, eating a meal, or fishing in a trout pond, Gracie and Elijah demonstrate faith and love in all they do.

Colette is a friend and partner at Macon Middle School with whom I am able to run ideas, discuss problems, and celebrate accomplishments. She always encourages me and is a trusted friend. Colette's sons, Cameron and Caiden, are full of love and a zeal for life as well. Every time Cameron scares me with his daily *Boo!* or Caiden says *C'mon, April, C'mon* when he wants me to be part of the fun, I feel blessed beyond measure.

While I develop as a person and no matter how far my *home*, my refuge, extends, I will always have my residence, my family, and my faith. I was reminded of this when Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and I went on a week-long trip to Washington, Oregon, and California in June 2007. Dad and Mom had talked about going on a family trip out west since Jennifer and I were children. We managed to get the trip planned and plane tickets booked ahead of time. In the past, when we planned to go on a vacation a scheduling conflict, injury, or illness had always seemed to prevent it. That year, however, we went on an unforgettable trip as a family.

I remember that trip and its details as if it were happening right this moment. On Sunday, we enter Hartsfield-Jackson Airport in Atlanta at seven a.m. Our flight is at ten

a.m., so we are early to compensate for busy lines and heightened security in airports. I do not like to fly anyway. I get a sharp pain in my ears and motion sickness. So, standing in an hour-long line just to board an airplane does not thrill me. I take a Dramamine pill to hinder my motion sickness as I wait in line, dreading the long journey ahead.

I glance over at Jennifer. She seems more nervous than me. This is going to be her first time flying anywhere. She looks like she just wishes it were over with and she was standing on land again. I reflect back to my first flight. Eight-hour trip. No family. Scared to death. I am glad Jennifer's first flight is going to be with us.

When we get through the metal detector and security check, Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and I walk toward the waiting area. We wait approximately an hour before it is time to board the plane. We are sitting next to the window. Dad and Mom sit in one pair of seats, and Jennifer and I sit in another pair of seats behind them. Jennifer and I talk about what we will see on our drive from Seattle, Washington, to San Diego, California: the Olympic Mountains, the Pacific Ocean, the Redwood National Park, and the Golden Gate Bridge. We eat a bag of peanuts and drink a Coca-Cola to make the time go more quickly.

Five hours later, we land in Seattle-Tacoma Airport. After renting a Ford Escape, we leave the airport, heading toward the Olympic Loop. This loop circles the Olympic Peninsula, including the Olympic Mountain Range and Olympic National Park. During the 300-mile trip, we drive up Mount Olympus until we reach a bridge. In June, the mountain is still covered by snow and ice. Shortly after that, we turn around and head back down the mountain. The 7,963 feet is too much of a summit for us to master, so we stop about halfway up the mountain. My fear of heights has a lot to do with our decision to turn around.

While in Washington, we look throughout the Olympic Peninsula for Roosevelt elk. We only see a half-dozen elk in tall fields of grass. Jennifer and I are disappointed by the lack of wildlife, because our wildlife pamphlet says we should be seeing a lot of elk by now. Mom has just finished saying, *I guess we will not get to see any elk*. I glance over to a farmhouse on the left. I see fourteen calves lying in the field. I point, and Dad turns around and pulls into the driveway. We sit in the driveway for fifteen minutes, looking at the elk. They slowly get up and walk back into the wooded area. *We have been sitting here too long*, Dad says.

After spending the night in Washington, we head toward Portland, Oregon. We drive down the Pacific Coast Scenic Byway along Highway 101. The drive consists of twists and turns around rocky cliffs, looking down on the cold and churning water of the Pacific Ocean. I am accustomed to many large, sandy beaches at places like Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head, South Carolina, and Carolina Beach, North Carolina. The dirty and sparse sands of the beaches of Oregon are a surprise. Haystack Rock, one of the largest monoliths in the world, on Cannon Beach is an amazing site. It is 235 feet tall and is the home of many sea birds and various kinds of marine life. It is a solitary site, looming from the floor of the Pacific Ocean.

On day three, we reach California Scenic Highway, still on Highway 101. First, we take the Redwood Scenic Highway. We drive twelve miles each way and enjoy the towering redwoods and the calmness of the roads. We are not able to attempt the Big Tree Drive-Thru, also called the Chandelier Tree, because the Ford Escape is too large to enter the opening. Nevertheless, we sit down and enjoy the picturesque beauty of the stand of trees before we leave the area.

Upon leaving the Redwood Scenic Highway, we drive down the Pacific Coast Highway, staying near the coast. Our plan takes us through many cities in California, among them San Francisco. We travel up and down two-lane roads, trying to find our way to the Golden Gate Bridge and then out of San Francisco. We still have a long way to travel, so we drive faster during the last two days, as we take I-5 toward San Diego. Many miles pass by in a whirl.

Finally, on the last day, we arrive in San Diego. Our hotel is at a marina. We can see houseboats with children playing on board. We walk down the street to buy a bite to eat and go shopping at local stores. The next morning, we fly out of San Diego Airport, but with less of a security mess. Approximately five hours later, we land in Hartsfield-Jackson Airport, and about an hour and a half later we are sitting in our driveway in Franklin.

The most surprising part of the trip was that the people of Washington, Oregon, and California were so friendly and kind. They would stop and talk to us when they heard our accents. Clerks would go out of their way to help us find supplies at supermarkets. A gentleman at one lake in Oregon invited us to go out on the lake on his boat. We were trying to keep on schedule, so we thanked him and went on our way. Waiters and waitresses helped us find tourist sites when we were unsure of the way. Store owners talked to us about good places to eat.

Even though we enjoyed our trip, Dad, Mom, Jennifer and I are glad to be *home*. After driving more than 1,000 miles and seeing the beauty of the West Coast, I still appreciate *home* and what it has to offer. We are excited to be in our own house again in Cartoogechaye and among family and friends. No one kisses the ground when they step

off the airplane on this family trip. Still, Dad, Mom, Jennifer, and I are glad to see our extended family and friends again. We are safe. We are *home*.





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